Minority women in politics

The political participation and representation of minority and migrant women in Europe

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Juweria Ali is a second year PhD student in Politics and International Relations at the University of Westminster, London. Her research interest is based on the Ogaden-Somali region where she seeks to examine the intersection of power and everyday forms of resistance to domination in relation to the Ethiopian state. She is also interested in state expressions of gendered oppression specifically in occupied territories through the lens of intersectional feminist theory. Juweria serves as the Advocacy Chair on the Ogaden youth and Student Union’s worldwide board where she directs the organisation’s advocacy campaigns, she has presented at various national and international conferences including parliamentary hearings at the European Parliament and events at the United Nations.

Charlotte Andrews works in the UK Parliament, where she develops multilateral international programmes to strengthen parliamentary democracy and facilitate diplomacy. She holds an MLitt in Peace and Conflict Studies and specialises in human rights, geopolitics, and conflict resolution. Her previous experience is comprised of work with international institutions, with non-governmental organisations in minority rights and peacebuilding, and with governmental departments in international trade and development.

Migmar Dhakyel is a Swiss-Tibetan activist based in Berlin. She is currently the Campaign Coordinator of Tibet Initiative Germany. She was member of parliament of Wädenswil from 2010 to 2012. From 2010 to 2014, she was a board member of the Tibetan Youth Association in Europe. She has helped establish the Tibet Advocacy Coalition in 2013 and has been briefing diplomats and experts at the UN ever since. She holds a BA in International Relations from the University of Geneva.

Tommaso Nodari holds an LLM in International Law from the University of Edinburgh and a MSc in Law from Bocconi University. Between 2014 and 2018, Tommaso worked for the UNPO, an international, nonviolent and democratic membership organisation composed of indigenous peoples, minorities, and unrecognised States that have joined together to defend their political, social and cultural rights. Tommaso now works for Civil Rights Defenders and is in charge of the coordination of their EU advocacy strategy. He also had brief experiences at the European Commission and at the Italian Embassy in The Hague and has held several volunteer positions within CIVS International, a peace education organisation.

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She has worked in academia, politics and media. She worked as a fieldworker for the Scottish Gypsy Traveller Association and regularly liaised with Amnesty International (Scotland). Her work has largely focused on promoting and protecting human rights, especially for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities.

Irene Gómez Santos was born in Perú and emigrated to Europe in the 90s. While living in Italy, Germany and Spain, Irene obtained a degree in Law and became a human rights activist working on the rights of immigrants in Europe. She is the founder of the Amuinca Association, as well as a mother and grandmother. She is currently writing her doctoral thesis on the right to work for foreigners in Spain and is a deputy in Les Corts Valencianes.

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Over the past century progressive leaps have been made in eliminating women’s formal discrimination. Gender equality is now part of the binding catalogue of EU fundamental rights, yet it has been implemented unevenly across the union. However, the extent of intersectional disadvantage is difficult to assess given the lack of comprehensive data so simple typologies about women’s relationship with institutions of power are inadequate. Women’s engagement with institutions of power is as varied as the women themselves, and it often reflects their social location at the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, class, sexuality, age and other factors, as these can shape the range of options available to them throughout their lives.

Women in the EU make up more than half of the electorate, yet women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions and processes, despite being highly educated. The equal participation of women and men in decision-making, is a matter of democracy, respect for human rights, justice and good governance. For women from ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, migrant and stateless minority groups, political participation is also a matter of necessity, since their identity and background often expose them to specific injustices and hostilities. According to minority and migrant women themselves, gender hierarchies, discrimination, and violence remain entrenched in different ways across multiple arenas in their lives. This high level of political engagement is expressed in the form of regularly voting at elections, joining cultural associations and social movements, as well as organizing and participating in direct actions like demonstrations and rallies, both in large capitals and on Europe’s periphery. Yet despite their mobilization on the grassroots level, minority and migrant women remain largely marginalised in the exercise of political power.

Persistent inequalities hinder their more explicitly political activity like running for political office or campaigning with political parties. While the risks and costs of running in elections are generally higher for women than men, many minority and migrant women face additional constraints in terms of time-commitment and financing. This is especially true for women who divide their energies and juggle multiple ‘delicate loyalties’ within a variety of social movements and civil society organisations, which are often organised around single issues or identities. Women in our study blame a combination of language discrimination, lack of political education, and gender-based discrimination for inhibiting their political participation. All but Breton women confirm feeling discouraged from pursuing political actions or positions because they regularly witness women being sexualized, infantilized, and objectified in male-dominated political domains. Many do not join existing associations because they view them as unrepresentative to women and express feeling silenced and dismissed as inferior within mainstream political structures.

Basque, Breton, Welsh and Kurdish women say they feel represented in local and regional politics, but less so on the state and European level, while women from Western Thrace report feeling unrepresented at all levels. Breton women emphasize feeling alienated from the political sphere and cite prejudices against the Breton community more often than discrimination against women as limiting their access to the political sphere. Moreover, although Kurdish women have seen their presence in political life grow, they also express feeling unrepresented due to Turkey’s repressive and conservative political climate.

Instead of adopting a "one size fits all approach" in combating the underrepresentation of women in politics, public institutions, equality bodies, political parties, foundations, research institutes and civil society groups need to develop and adopt measures that take into consideration the multiple, diverse, and intersecting needs of minority and migrant women. To support and promote them, political actors need to invest in accessible training and mentoring programs; establish a rule for zero-tolerance to sexism and other forms of discrimination with clear channels to report sexual harassment or hate speech; change the "long hours" and "boy’s club" culture of politics and promote work-life balance for both women and men, while also providing accessible and free childcare facilities; adopt measures to ensure gender-balanced electoral lists; provide funding for women candidates; support minority and migrant women’s associations and networks; and regularly consult and empower minority and migrant women to drive the policy agenda.”

Executive summary

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Introduction

By Iva Petković

1. Women and power

Politics is a male-dominated practice and academic discipline. The idea that politics is "men's business" is ubiquitous and rooted in broader social processes. What counts as 'political' continues to be informed by our beliefs about who is appropriate for political work or office and the ways in which masculine and feminine gender roles are ascribed to males and females. Despite a surge in the number of women who are high-profile politicians, heads of state, and leaders of international organizations, women and their interests are still under-represented at all levels of government. Significant gender differences also exist in terms of political knowledge, interest and efficacy.1 Increasing women's political participation and representation is commonly seen as part of building responsive and accountable democracies, but scholars are still divided about whether the focus should be on women's quantitative representation or the content and impact of specific political actions on women.

Women's 'descriptive representation' is their numerical presence in primarily legislative and executive branches of government. Its central assumption is that numbers do matter. Literature has identified factors that hinder women's path into political office like traditional gender norms, family support, party recruitment and backing, electoral systems, and campaign financing. While all candidates face challenges during political campaigns, women are three times more likely to worry about gender discrimination and twice as likely to fear not being taken seriously.2 Data shows that women who run in elections are significantly more likely than men to have families who support their political career or to be single, separated, divorced or widowed, and they tend to have fewer children than their male counterparts.3 Women are also more commonly elected under proportional representation systems than in Anglo-American single-member systems. In proportional representation systems, parties have more space to balance their party lists to attract support from diverse groups, while in single-member systems, huge efforts must be made to maintain intra-party peace when men are asked to step aside in favour of a woman candidate.4 Another deterrent from running for office is lack of campaign funding; women need to campaign harder than their male counterparts, because they need win over greater numbers of donors since people tend to make smaller contributions to women.5

Indeed, almost two thirds of members of the European Parliament (MEP) are men. Even more worryingly, at least three quarters of MEPs from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Cyprus, Hungary and Lithuania are men.6 Across Europe's national parliaments men make up seventy-one percent of all legislators, but in Hungary and Malta they represent eighty-nine percent and eighty-five percent of members of parliament (MP) respectively.7 The situation is only marginally better on the regional level. Regional councils in Sweden are close to gender parity, while the gap remains alarmingly wide in Hungary and Slovakia where women make up less than a sixth of all regional councillors.8 On the executive side, only nine out of twenty-eight European Commissioners are women. While Hungary has no women ministers, and Sweden has more women ministers than men, on average women represent less than a third of all national ministers. Moreover, women make up only thirty-six percent of regional presidents and members of the executive with the biggest

1 Pyeatt and Yusso, 2017.
2 Rosenbluth et al., 2015, p. 23.
3 Rosenbluth et al., 2015, p. 22.
4 Duverger, 1955; Castles, 1981; Bravo-Ortega et al., 2016.
5 Ballington and Kahane, 2014; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009.
6 EIGE, 2018.
7 EIGE, 2018.
8 EIGE, 2018.
gaps found in Poland, Croatia, Greece, Czech Republic, and Portugal. Lastly, on the municipal level, women make up less than a quarter of mayors in Germany, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Austria, and Romania.

Linked to this descriptive representation is the question of ‘substantive representation’ or the idea that women in politics act in the general interest of women by prioritizing policy concerns important to them based on their own experiences as women. Substantive representation is less focused on attaining a critical mass of women in politics, and more with key influential actors who promote women’s interests and broader changes in political institutions, behaviour, and policy. Assessing whether descriptive representation leads to substantive representation faces many methodological challenges. Legislative discipline, the culture of party unity, institutional norms, and the external political environment may exaggerate agreement between women and men in a given party.

The weakness of the ‘add women’ argument is that women do not constitute a unified and stable social category with similar interests based only on their sex. Additionally, not all women are gender-aware; not all women legislators want to represent women’s interests; and not all women legislators can do so because of the parties to which they belong, the institutions in which they work, or the constituencies that have elected them. At the same time, this position also neglects to take men into account as potential allies working on behalf of women’s concerns. Although research has found little support for the critical mass thesis, some studies have found that men and women do have different policy and legislative priorities. They differ most on issues related to women’s rights. Moreover, studies show that women do contribute to shifts in political discourse, legislative practices and working conditions inside political institutions.

Like the practice of politics, the academic discipline is also limited by its own narrow ideological definitions. It reflects the androcentric biases of privileged men who developed the discipline’s subjects, concepts, methods, and categories to answer their own needs. While political science has broadened its scope more recently, gender is still ignored in much of political scholarship. The focus on government, electoral processes, political elites, and formal institutions has long obscured the realities and contributions of women who have been integral to important political developments, including feminist, queer, social, welfare, decolonization, peace, democratization, environmental, and community actions. The analytical exclusion of women within the Anglo-American discipline derives from the popular idea that political science should deal exclusively with the management of the public sphere. The ideology of the ‘separate spheres’ as a transcultural and transhistorical reality, albeit mistaken in its core assumptions, shapes how political institutions and legal systems exclude certain activities or actors, for example, in how economic value is seen to be created exclusively in the public productive sphere, and not in the private reproductive sphere.

While social sciences may appear to be objective, fact-based, and neutral, feminists have argued that “social power structures knowledge, so that the way we define and value knowledge reinforces patterns of class, race, and gender inequality.”14 This is why research carried out by women and people of colour tends to produce different results even when using the same research methods. Feminism, which is as much a theory as a practice, has not only challenged this positivist approach, but it has brought the personal, private and intimate spheres of life into critical academic endeavours. The task of transforming the discipline also encompassed the necessary gendering of traditional units of analysis like ‘nations’ or ‘citizens’, as well as the inclusion of women of colour, minority women, women in developing or low-income countries, refugee and migrant women, working class and poor women, rural women, women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons etc.

2. Intersectionality as an analytical tool

This research uses intersectionality as an analytical tool for critically studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other social categories of identity like race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, legal status, sexuality, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, and age. Considering that human rights violations tend to be categorised as single-issue problems, intersectionality is ground-breaking in its recognition that people experience multiple social systems of oppression, which are mutually constituted and work together to (re)produce social inequality and unequal access to status, property, and power.15 Intersectionality has been widely used in research and social justice

13 EIGE, 2018.
14 Lovenduski and Norris, 2003; Celis et al., 2008; Chlota, 2008.
15 Celis et al., 2008, p. 102.
action, so much so that it has even been criticised for becoming an over-used but poorly understood theoretical buzzword.

The concept of intersectionality was first coined by black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, but is rooted in decades of activism and analysis by women of colour and queer/lesbian women, such as Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Frances Beale, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Lawrence Moraga, among others. In her seminal article, Crenshaw points out that multi-layered forms of domination often converge in women’s lives and shape their experiences of social phenomena. To demonstrate how structural intersectional discrimination functions, Crenshaw looked specifically at male violence and argued that women of colour experience it qualitatively differently. Poor black women are more likely to lack the necessary resources to remove themselves from dangerous situations, while at the same time, social and legal services do not adequately protect them or address their needs.

Crenshaw’s case study also shows that the matrix of gender, race and class domination obscures the distinct experiences of women of colour because “the narratives of gender are based on the experiences of white, middle-class women, and the narratives of race are based on the experience of Black men.” In practice this means that nationality, race, ethnicity, and language are often excluded from contemporary feminist movements, while anti-racist and pro-diversity efforts tend to ignore the gender dimension of their work. Such political agendas appear as though they are working on ‘mutually exclusive terrain’, even though they intersect in the daily lives of real people.

Moreover, the “failure of feminism to interrogate race means that resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of colour and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women.” As a result, women must often choose between their identities/loyalties and consequently divide their political energies between, at times, opposing political agendas, whether it be feminism or, disability activism or labour organising. Individuals who experience intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression also have fewer opportunities to speak about their multi-dimensional or hyphenated identities.

Likewise, minority women in Europe suffer from social prejudice and institutional barriers. Various intersecting systems of oppression like sexism, state nationalism, xenophobia, racism, neoliberalism, conservative fundamentalism, homophobia, ableism, and ageism reinforce their vulnerability to discrimination, social exclusion and poverty. Despite an alarming lack of accurate or complete sex-segregated data in this field, studies to date show that minority women consistently face greater disadvantages in terms of employment, education, health, housing, social and financial services than the men from their community or majority women. Moreover, migrant women also suffer due to ineffective and gender-blind asylum and migration policies, which leave them at risk of sexual exploitation, trafficking, and other human rights violations both while on the move and after settling in Europe. Minority women’s invisibility in both research and policymaking continues to reproduce these inequalities because their particular needs and interests are not adequately reflected in laws, policies, programs and budgets on the local, regional, national and European level.

Put simply, discrimination can occur on more than one ground. This is experienced as either (1) multiple disadvantage whereby discrimination on different grounds is experienced on separate occasions, (2) cumulative disadvantage whereby discrimination is additive, (3) intersectional discrimination whereby it is mutually constituted on different grounds. Although discrimination law focuses on the role of ‘grounds’, as an analytical tool can help reveal relationships of power, and provide a more complete, multidimensional, and dynamic picture of disadvantage. Women experience gender-based discrimination, because of how power relations are forged through gender, however, these experiences differ for different women in material ways, since other factors like nationality, class or religion also intimately shape the nature of power relations.

Even though the concept is often inadvertently misused, intersectional analysis is useful in that it can help provide a basis for solidarity work that does not further sideline marginalised women. Intersectional scholarship and praxis should avoid both essentialising or erasing differences. Instead it should consider the political, historical, and cultural context in which emancipatory struggles are situated. According to Mohanty, “sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis.”

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16 Crenshaw, 1991, p. 12
17 Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1
18 Crenshaw, p. 5
19 Dustin, p. 28
20 Corsi et al., 2008
21 Mohanty, 2003, p. 24
3. Objectives and methodology

The focus of this study is the political participation and representation of minority women, including women from ethnic, national, linguistic, cultural, religious, migrant, and stateless minority groups. As there is no universally accepted definition of ‘minority’, this study uses a broad and inclusive understanding of the term. This means that in addition to established minorities that coexist on the same territory for prolonged periods of time with shared cultural norms and practices, our definition of ‘minority’ encompasses unrecognised or ‘new’ minorities, like migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees whose ethnicity, culture and language differs from the dominant or majority group. This study foregoes using an essentialist model whereby minority groups are solely understood in contrast to the majority. Instead, it adopts a nuanced understanding of minorities as internally diverse and made up of heterogeneous individuals who relate to the group in different ways.

This study identifies qualitative and quantitative differences in representation, analyses factors that produce better levels of representation in some places but not in others and describes historical and recent developments in different parts of Europe. While this research does not assess the impact of minority women’s numerical presence in politics in terms of policy gains, it does spotlight minority women’s political activities, understood in the broadest sense. Voting, joining a political party, running for elections, governing, signing a petition, demonstrating, boycotting, tweeting, volunteering, fundraising or blogging are all be understood as political participation and engagement. This paper shows how minority women engage with social movements, political parties, and governmental institutions, while navigating their distinct political environments. As this book demonstrates, although progress has not been uniform or uncontested, minority women have organised to demand their rights, change cultural attitudes, reform laws and policies, build women’s policy institutes, and provide vital social services to women in need where formal institutions have failed to do so.

The first section analyses minority women’s political engagement and representation with five case studies of national minorities or stateless nations: Welsh women in the United Kingdom, Basque women in Spain, Kurdish women in Turkey, Breton women in France, and Turkish-Muslim women in Greece. The selected case studies allow us to identify the impact of different institutional structures, social rights, and cultural norms and practices on women’s political engagement and representation. The study uses qualitative data from structured surveys with seventy-six minority women between the ages of eighteen and seventy-four, from all social classes and professional backgrounds who self-identify as belonging to one of the case groups under analysis.

Rejecting the traditional scholar-activist divide, the second section features essays by minority women who have specific experience with migration – either as first or second-generation immigrants – or statelessness in Europe. Inspired by Patricia Hill Collins’s black feminist epistemology – an alternative epistemology based upon lived experiences, collective knowledge, dialogue, and empathy – this section centres the subjective experiences and analysis of minority women who may otherwise be marginalised out of contemporary scientific scholarship to generate new understanding, frameworks and questions about their political engagement in Europe. It also provides minority women a space to raise their concerns on their own terms as so-called “outsiders-within.” The contributions, written by women who are diverse in age, background, and occupation, were recommended by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation and the European Network of Migrant Women.

The third section of the book draws conclusions by identifying factors that impact women’s political participation and representation, mapping commonalities and differences across Europe, as well as listing policy recommendations to further women’s effective political equality.
Within the broader context of its history of political subjugation, there are two primary strains of influence that have had the most profound impact on the political participation and representation of women in Wales, and particularly the achievement of gender parity within its national governing body. Interconnected both ideologically and chronologically, the devolution of Welsh political power and the women’s liberation movement have had the most salient effect on policy change and opportunity structure in the Welsh political system.

The commonalities between the devolution of power and the struggle for gender equality include two important elements that are often intertwined: the Welsh national movement and progressivism. Naturally, the Welsh national movement is woven into the discourse of political devolution, but it has also played a role in the women’s liberation movement and the rise of Plaid Cymru, the Welsh national political party, which has been led by Member of the Welsh National Assembly Leanne Wood since March of 2012. Progressivism is also responsible for the atmosphere of social change that has influenced constitutional reform in Wales, but perhaps more significantly, it has provided a strong political undercurrent upon which gender equality activism could gain credibility in the late 20th century.

Despite being encumbered by British nationalism and patriarchal norms, Welsh women’s national and gender identities appear to be converging and mutually influencing their ideas about equality and representation, unsurprising in a context of women’s grassroots organising, strong trade union organising, as well as ongoing revitalisation of Welsh culture. In modern-day Wales, the challenges facing women are deeply intertwined with the contemporary issues affecting the United Kingdom. The unprecedented 2003 Welsh gender parity triumph and a series of rapid successes in the twenty-first century has simultaneously served to further entrench patriarchal attitudes among conservative voters. The resurgence of right-wing populist parties has opened the door for regressive rhetoric concerning the role of women in the private and public spheres.

1. From suffragists to gender parity

The social, cultural, and political environments in Wales were markedly different from those of England during the early and mid-20th century. Due to the style of the campaign and its focus on political power centres, women within political organisations who lobbied for women’s suffrage and bore the title of ‘Suffragettes’ were predominantly based in England. Suffragettes faced political backlash and were stigmatised throughout the United Kingdom, and Wales was no exception. In Wales, the Suffragettes worked to raise awareness about women’s suffrage, but inadvertently side-lined Welsh women’s political offshoots. For this reason, Welsh women’s suffrage experienced latent development. Welsh activists labelled themselves ‘suffragists’, distancing themselves from English notions of modern womanhood and foregoing the controversial title of ‘Suffragettes’ that came to be associated with the radical Women’s Social and Political Union.¹

Welsh political history shows continuity of support for feminism. By the early 1890s, support for women’s suffrage had already taken root in Wales with the creation of many Women’s Liberal Associations. At the time when land reform, education, and language became collective and defining questions for the Welsh national

¹ Bohata, 2002
movement, women’s campaigns were expanding educational and professional opportunities for Welsh women, at least for middleclass women. As the women’s suffrage campaign developed and adapted to increase its numbers by attempting to expanded to previously untapped segments of civil society – minority women, working class women, rural women, and other subsects of the female population – it built-up critical mass.

The partnership between the Welsh Union of Women’s Liberal Associations and Cymru Fydd, a Welsh movement that sought reform and separation from British political structures, led to a unique convergence between early feminism and nationalism. The decision of Cymru Fydd in 1895 to incorporate women’s suffrage into its objectives and privilege the Welsh Union of Women’s Liberal Associations into its structures marked a new development in the progressive culture of Wales. Notable women like Nora Philipps, chair of the Women’s Union of Welsh Liberals, wrote in 1896 in celebration of the Welsh minority-nationalists’ alignment with and support for women’s political representation.2

Throughout this period, the Women Say Yes pro-devolution campaign, originally an initiative tied to the Labour party, decided to rise above partisanship so that the issue of increasing women’s participation was at the forefront. The campaign managed to incorporate a diverse set of women’s political organisations, including Minority Ethnic Women’s Network Wales, and ultimately, and due to its effective method of inclusivity, succeeded in raising the profile of gender equality within the context of the devolution campaign.”3

Women over the age of thirty originally gained the right to vote in 1918, and women were finally granted equal voting rights as men with the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act of 1928.

The women’s liberation movement in 1970s Britain paved the way for consequent political and discursive shifts.4 Securing women’s rights became a key element of policy agendas across the political spectrum; discrimination on the basis of gender was deemed unlawful, and issues regarding domestic violence gained critical attention. As a social movement, it was critical that the women’s liberation movement contributes to policy reform because British patriarchy-nationalism-capitalism “are rooted within political institutions and reinforce power relations.”5 Women’s organisations maintained pressure on political parties to adopt policy agendas that were consistent with their gender equality objectives.

As former Welsh professor Jane Aaron explains, there were no noteworthy developments resulting from feminist efforts in late 20th century Wales until the National Assembly attained gender parity. From 1999 to 2003, the percentage of women in Welsh politics rose from forty-two percent to fifty percent,7 and so, Wales became the first national governmental body in the world to realise gender parity. The Welsh Assembly is lauded for being "the first legislative body with equal numbers of men and women in the world."4 Paul Chaney argues that the makeup of the 1999 Assembly was a tipping point for gender equality in Wales, primarily because women in the Assembly achieved a critical mass, allowing gender equality activists to lobby more effectively.8 Wales even briefly achieved a parallel between political representation and its national demographic during 2006 when female Assembly Members (AM) held slightly more seats than those held by males, mirroring the fifty-two percent female population.10

However, gender parity has not been maintained with consistency at a national level, and the inadequate number of women appointed to local government seats speaks to the tenuousness of gender equality in Wales.11 This is due in large part to the highly gender balanced Labour, Lib Dem, and Plaid Cymru parties, which are consistently offset by male-dominated the Conservative Party and UK Independence Party (UKIP).12

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1 Aaron, 2017.
2. Recent efforts to closing the gender gap

In comparison to Westminster, it appears that the National Assembly improved gender parity in leaps and bounds. The devolution of power has played a critical role in contemporary Welsh politics and on gender equality within Wales. As Aaron points out, devolution marked an opportunity to build what would become Welsh home-rule, and to thus integrate certain principles in its very foundations.13 Gender equality successfully latched onto a moment of opportunity in Welsh devolution, but this was made possible by centuries of steady work by gender equality activists, as well as the women who became political agents.

Wales’s roster of achievements in equal representation has largely been dependent on the relative success of the Welsh Labour party and the Plaid Cymru party. In an effort to close the gender gap in their representation in the House of Commons, the Labour party enacted a policy of all-women shortlists in 1993, a defining step in the party’s concerted gender equality efforts that have grown in scale since 1989.14 In the 1999 Assembly election, the Labour Party relied on a practice termed ‘twinning’, wherein both male and female candidates were selected for paired constituencies. Plaid Cymru relied on other initiatives to increase their pool of female candidates by enacting a “policy of prioritising women candidates on the party’s regional shortlists.”15 In the general election of 1997, the number of women MPs in Westminster doubled.16

While the policies of the Labour party were more effective in achieving gender parity, the efforts made by Plaid Cymru are indicative of the influence gender equality activists had upon the national party platform. The political evolution of Welsh women is inextricably tied to Welsh national identity both despite and because of oppositional nationalist campaigns. For this reason, Wales is paradigmatic of the versatility of progressive national projects as a political tool.

In 2016, women made up forty-two percent of AMs in Wales, a proportion that is higher than the Scottish Parliament with thirty-five percent, the House of Commons with twenty-nine percent, and the Northern Ireland Assembly twenty-eight percent.17 Additionally, the National Assembly’s obligation to promote gender equality is mandated by the Government of Wales Act of 1998 and its successor, the Government of Wales Act of 2006. The Equality Act 2010 enacted the duty to promote gender equality within all Welsh public bodies. Despite this, on the local level, women hold only twenty-six percent of council seats in Wales.18

The Labour and Plaid Cymru parties also “face criticisms that they regard the hard work as having been done in terms of the equality agenda,” particularly in areas of child care provisions and domestic violence. For example, it took a concerted effort on the part of women’s rights supporters to highlight that the Gender-Based Violence Bill needed to distinguish and specify that women suffer disproportionately as victims of domestic violence. The National Assembly ultimately passed the appropriately renamed Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Wales Act, which is a testament to the dynamism and preparedness of Welsh feminist campaigners.

The right-wing party UKIP has seen increased support from the electorate in Wales as the mouthpiece for Euroscepticism in the lead up to the 2016 Brexit referendum. Unlike Scotland, Wales overwhelmingly (fifty-two percent) voted for the UK to leave the European Union in the 2016 Brexit referendum. The Women’s Equality Network Wales noted several potential negative effects Brexit could have on Welsh women both in the short and long term. For example, the loss of funding from the European Social Fund would impact the capacity of Welsh charities to support women living in poverty. On a larger scale, however, if the Welsh economy struggles post-Brexit, women would be disproportionately affected, taking into account that thirty percent more women are working part-time than men in Wales and often in low-paid roles.21

Additionally, women are the backbone of rural communities in Wales, and the effects of an economic downturn are compounded in these areas. In April 2017, Women in Agriculture Forum Members presented a report to the Wales’ Cabinet Secretary for the Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, outlining their perspectives on how Welsh agricultural policy can proactively respond to and prepare for Brexit.22 The report expressed a strong aversion to a ‘hard’ Brexit and argued in favour of promoting sustainable farming methods.

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13 Aaron, 2017, p. 46
14 Berry, 2014
16 Charles, 2004, p. 303
17 Holminger et al., 2016
19 Edwards and McAllister, 2002, p. 164
20 BBC, 2016
21 Davies, 2017
22 Farming Connect Women, 2017
3. Women’s political engagement in modern-day Wales

The women who participated in our study are remarkably politically active with most reporting that they belong to a political party, while many are also involved in local Welsh culture and language organisations or participate in direction action like rallies or protests for Welsh independence and language education. As a group, they described considerable involvement in issues affecting Wales, but less involvement in issues affecting women.

Welsh women expressed feeling able to participate in politics at every level except the European level, but also mention experiencing obstacles to participating in politics as women due to the perception that politics is a “man’s field”. Three participants voiced that they were not taken seriously and had to work harder than men in the same positions. In sharing their own experiences of being Welsh women, one said: “Regardless of whether or not anyone is being blatantly misogynistic or homophobic it takes a lot of mental energy not to feel out of place in spaces that are dominated by old, white, middle class men.”

One of the mentioned barriers to civil society participation is the fact that existing associations or groups are not perceived as attractive or representative with one respondent explaining that she considered joining Cymdeithas yr Iaith but felt “that their approach can be a little old fashioned and narrow minded.”

As Welsh women they feel represented in local and regional politics, but less so on the state and European level. Following the 2017 snap election, the House of Commons in Westminster currently has only 208 women members out of 650 members (thirty-two percent), a slight increase from thirty percent. Within the UK Parliament, women represent less than a third of Welsh constituencies. Since the 2017 general election these seats are divided between the Welsh Labour Party, Welsh Conservative Party, and Plaid Cymru, with none of these parties reaching gender parity, but the conservatives performing poorly having elected no women candidates. Currently, there are five women in the Cabinet, including the Prime Minister, which is twenty-two percent of Cabinet posts.

Following the 2014 European Parliament elections, forty-one percent of UK MEPs are women. Wales has four MEPs, two of which are women. Jill Evans represents Plaid Cymru and sits with the Greens-European Free Alliance political group, while Kay Swinburne was elected with the Welsh Conservative Party and sits in the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists political group. Before working in politics, Jill Evans worked for six years for the Welsh branch of the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, before taking up a post as Wales Regional Organiser for CHILD - The National Infertility Support Network, while Kay Swinburne has worked in international business, finance and healthcare. Since taking up her seat in the European Parliament in 1999, Jill Evans has been elected as the first Vice President of The Greens-EFA political group and as the Vice President of the Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities Committee.

On the same side of the political spectrum as Jill Evans is AM and Leader of Plaid Cymru, Leanne Wood, with a long history of demonstrating her commitment to social justice, feminism, sustainable agriculture and Welsh independence. Both women speak Welsh, but Leanne Wood chose to learn Welsh as she was not a native speaker. Her political career has made her a distinctive role model for Welsh women and girls, but there is also a subtle layer of influence in her being the first non-native Welsh speaking leader of Plaid Cymru, heralding in a new age of linguistic revival for the Welsh national movement. Most of the respondents confirmed that they had been inspired by Leanne Wood.

When asked to suggest ways to improve the political representation of women from Wales, the responses emphasised political education and positive examples at all levels, but with the local level being particularly important as this woman’s answer stressed: “Making politics personal and relatable and accessible on the grassroots level will in time have a domino effect on other, higher levels of politics.” Another participant added that she is inspired by women who support quotidian life: “the quiet ones who work on the local level without anyone ever noticing” and the “women who contribute to culture, artists, authors…”

Welsh women confirmed that women are still discouraged from pursuing political positions because they witness the way other women are treated – sexualised, infantilised, and objectified – making it impossible to access the brand of power that is automatically afforded to men.

Welsh women acknowledge the “double prejudice” of being a woman and a Welsh speaker, which “often share parallels” of being quickly dismissed or seen as inferior to being male or an English speaker. Welsh women experience multiple layers of discrimination, especially since using Welsh at university and work remains a challenge. While this may not represent a barrier to cultural and political engagement
for bilinguals, language accessibility remains a pressing issue for women who are solely native Welsh speakers.

The majority of the surveyed Welsh women (eighty-three percent) report that issues faced by Welsh people collectively affect their individual political decisions, particularly with regard to support for Welsh culture, language, and autonomy. One participant explains that while studying Welsh devolution, her combined national and feminist perspective was repeatedly “shrugged off”. Another added that, “it often feels like a double or triple prejudice to face. I'm a Welsh speaker, a Welsh citizen and a Welsh woman, and I face challenges relating to these identities and they sometimes intertwine.”

Another Welsh woman explained: “It often feels like a 'double prejudice' ... I have faced prejudices due to the fact that I am a woman and my Welsh identity... these can range from being silenced or ignored to not been taken seriously. My nationality/language is dismissed or seen as inferior, for example.”

Both equal pay and domestic violence represent issues that are important to Welsh women, but these are also issues that can be intentionally and advantageously framed within Welsh culture. Both of these gender equality foci have the added significance of playing upon certain values, such as the history of labour unions in Wales for issues of equal pay or the strength of Welsh kinship structures for issues of domestic violence.
At the turn of the twentieth century, nascent Basque national movements provided a unique space and lens for Basque women to become politically involved in the public sphere, because of their long-held status as ‘protectors’ of Basque cultural identity. Although strict gender divisions were still in place at the time, the convergence of the private and public realms in Basque national movements provided women with greater freedom to redefine their social roles. Yet as fascism gripped Spain, women’s involvement in political activism could only develop within clandestine organisations and unions until the fall of the military dictatorship.

Although strict patriarchal hegemony remained officially entrenched throughout Spain until the end of Francisco Franco’s conservative and authoritarian regime in 1975, contemporary Basque society is at the forefront of European public policy on gender equality. In the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), for example, public authorities are obligated to integrate a gender perspective in all policies and actions, and the Basque Women’s Institute, Emakunde, strengths and supports women’s local associations and their participation in the design of equality policies. From political parties to academia, the BAC takes a stronger stance than the rest of Spain in acknowledging gender-based inequalities. Young Basques who were raised in the post-Franco period not only reject gender-based violence and discrimination, but also embrace diversity in terms of gender identities, sexual orientation, and different types of families.¹

One of the main threats to women’s rights in the Basque Country, according to Begoña Zabala, a lawyer and feminist activist working in the Chartered Community of Navarre (CCN), is the domain of production, reproduction and care work, especially taking into account that women’s work is taking place within a broader context of neoliberal capitalism, economic crises, cuts to public services, attacks on unions, as well as crackdowns on personal freedoms, which started decades ago with the criminalisation of protest movements and leftist pro-independence groups.²

1. Basque resistance – a platform for early women’s movements

Historically relegated to a secondary position by conservative traditions and values, women were excluded from social, political and economic life throughout Spain. Women’s roles in society were strictly confined to marriage and motherhood until the beginning of the twentieth century. “Very few women worked outside of the home and the ones that did so, were subordinated to men as unqualified workers in industry, agriculture or as domestic servants.”³

The ‘etxekoandere’, or the woman of the house in Basque, were tasked with uniting the family, safeguarding customs and overseeing the day-to-day management of households. The status of ‘etxekoandere’ as a “powerful symbol that projected an idealized image of the woman as a mediator and transmitter of Basque culture,”⁴ contributed to the widely-held belief that Basque women historically held a higher position in society than Castilian women. Yet the notion of the ‘Basque matriarch’ was essentialized with motherhood, and hence still limited to the management of the domestic sphere.

As local weariness with political subjugation grew, at the turn of the century, Basques formed their own associations to oppose Spanish cultural homogenisation
and economic exploitation. Basque women on the other hand questioned not only the hegemonic position of Spain, but also men. Interestingly, even though these early Basque associations maintained traditional gender roles, they also opened up spaces for women to join the movement because of their status as custodians of Basque culture, allowing women to gradually redefine their social roles in unprecedented ways. As early as 1906, the conservative Basque National Party began inviting nationalist women to help the movement by becoming writers for their press and crafting publicity material targeting other Basque women. This was the first time that women could work beyond the confines of the domestic sphere.

Ropero Vasco, the first autonomous nationalist women’s organisation, was created by women who shared a desire to participate more actively in the social and political life of the Basque Country. While Ropero Vasco’s activities were limited to charity work, soon after World War I, nationalist women also created Emakume Abertzale Batza. Although it followed a conservative, Catholic and patriotic ideology, it allowed women to participate in a broader range of social activities, inspiring many women to join. As the organisation grew – by 1936 the organisation had 28,000 members – women began to play an increasingly central role in Basque national politics.

On the other side of the border, Basque women formed Begiraleak in 1935, which became one of the most important spaces in the region working for the promotion of Basque culture, language and traditions. Begiraleak allowed women to gain visibility and become active participants in the Basque political struggle. Madeleine de Jáuregui, a leader of the Iparraldean or northern Basque women’s movement, reflected in 1936 that, “We are not conservative, we are friends of the Basque action,” and that, “we live, we sing, we dance during the struggle.”

In the context of widespread illiteracy and Spanish state control over the education system, Basque language education was seen as a key element of the Basque resistance movement. Julia Fernández Zabaleta, who founded the first Iruñeko Euskal Eskola, believed that, “a community that changes its language changes its way of thinking.”

As local opposition to linguistic homogenisation strengthened, it set the stage for the establishment of clandestine Euskera or Basque language schools called ‘ikastolas’. Elbira Zipitria played a crucial role in the further development of the ikastolas. She secretly taught Basque classes in her home and trained other young teachers to do the same. Her protegés, Itziar Arzelus, Faustina Karri, and Karmele Esnal, later opened their own schools or incorporated Zipitria’s teaching methods into already existing ikastolas.

The physician Argitxu Noblia became one of the most prominent figures in the movement for the revitalization of Basque language in Iparralde as the founder of Seaska, the ikastola movement of Iparralde, from 1969 onwards. The work of linguistic revitalisation was also led by Catalina Altuey and María Viscarret in Nafarroa. Basque women’s fundamental contribution to the Basque cultural movement never received the acclaim it deserved. Social prestige largely went to men’s literary works, performances, and ‘bertsolarí’ competitions where women have been largely absent until recently.

2. One step forward, two steps backward

The Second Spanish Republic was strikingly progressive for its times and had a profound impact on women’s rights. New legislation gave women the right to vote, legalised abortion and divorce, abolished sanctions for adultery, and allowed women’s political organisations to proliferate. The economic boom of the 1920s was responsible for creating new work opportunities for working and middle-class women who hoped to attain economic independence and play a greater role in Basque social activities. In this period autonomous women’s groups sprung up around the Basque Country, and helped run hospitals, soup kitchens, and orphanages. Despite these positive developments, women continued to play a secondary role with little to no access to political decision-making processes, both within and outside nationalist groups.

Once women were granted suffrage, various political parties began to involve women in the hope of attracting new voters. Outside of political parties, women were also active in advancing Basque national demands, as well as fighting against fascism in groups like the Association of Anti-Fascist Women (Asociación de Mujeres...
Antifascistas). Although it was initially linked to the Communist Party of Spain, it eventually included women across the progressive political spectrum. Its leader was Dolores Ibárruri, commonly known as ‘La Pasionaria’, a communist politician of Basque origin who believed that women, whatever their condition, were free to choose their destiny. It was the most important feminist organisation at the time and had fifteen sub-groups all over the Basque Country.

However, any progress achieved in terms of gender equality during the II Republic was curtailed by the 1936 fascist coup d’état and Franco’s subsequent rule, which was based on the principles of national Catholicism. His authoritarian rule restored traditional gender hierarchies and severely limited women to the private domain. Women could not own property or assets, have a bank account, work outside the home after marriage, drive or travel without their husband’s permission. Essentially, women and children became subjects of the male head of the household. To promote large families and reverse the demographic losses from the war, Franco’s oppressive regime passed new legislation that offered cash premiums for children, while also criminalising abortion. Laws on civil marriage and divorce were abolished, and female adultery was harshly punished.

Franco’s political party, the Falange, encouraged the creation of a separate women’s branch called the Sección Femenina that would nurse wounded Falangist soldiers and care for orphaned children. During the regime, however, the Sección Femenina worked on preparing women for their duties of marriage and motherhood in line with the regime’s conservative ideology. Unusually, however, once the reality of the liberalised Spanish economy of the 1950s and 1960s set in and created new job opportunities for women, the Sección Femenina also began advocating for Spanish women’s labour rights. “The female organisation responded with a mix of progressiveness and standard conservatism as it offered reform but held onto its traditional gender expectations.”

The women’s movement in Nafarroa suffered greatly. Once the region sided with Franco’s regime, a series of murders and disappearances targeted the opposition, while women committed to social justice and equality were subjected to particularly humiliating punishments. Women’s participation in the public sphere survived only through organizations linked to Catholic groups under the influence of the regime, such as Acción Católica or the Centros de Formación Familiar y Social.

As women joined the workforce towards the end of the dictatorship, Basque women also came in contact with clandestine social and political movements like ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), trade unions, and anarchist groups. Even though the popularity of the Basque anarchist movement was low, and despite the movement being inhibited by its own sexism, anarchist women like Soledad Casilda Hernández Vargas undoubtedly left their mark.

Similarly, ETA’s radical leftist nationalism was male-dominated, and women generally had to choose between political and familial commitments. Regardless of these constraints, many women were deeply active in the group. Women like Ione Dorronsoro, Itziar Aizpurua, Arantza Arruti Odriozola, Dolores Gonzalez Katarain (“Yoyes”), Belen Gonzalez Peñalva, and Carmen Disasola penetrated masculinised domains that had been previously inaccessible to them, including the military front and leadership positions.

While the central government approached ETA’s activities using an anti-terrorism strategy that relied heavily on police force, for many Basques who lived or grew up in Francoist Spain, ETA seemed like an important revolutionary movement fighting a dictatorial regime, opposing the repression of Basque identity, and advocating for socialism. Yoyes was the first woman to enter the senior ETA leadership, but when she decided to leave the organisation, her comrades perceived her to be a traitor and she was assassinated in 1986 in front of her three-year-old son. The killing represented a turning point and led to unprecedented criticism of ETA in the Basque Country. Other women like Itziar Aizpurua went on to have an active political life after ETA. She joined the Herri Batasuna political party and occupied leadership positions, including as a member of the Basque Parliament and member of Congress, after she was released in 1977 thanks to a new amnesty rule.

However, the conflict’s gender politics remain underexplored as women are either portrayed as relatives of victims or sensationalized as active combatants. Far less attention has been given to women as direct victims of politically-motivated gender-based violence and as active participants in the peace process. While the Basque peace process did not include a gender perspective, this does not mean that women were not concerned or involved. Belen Gonzalez Penalva played a crucial role in peace negotiations. She was a member of the ETA delegation that negotiated with the Spanish governments of Felipe Gonzalez in 1989 and with that of Jose Maria Aznar in 1999. Yet Madrid’s approach failed to understand broader political and social issues that underpinned ETA’s existence and did not recognise the benefits of negotiation. In fact, the Basque peace process intimately shaped the
wider feminist discourse on peace, which is not only to be understood in national or territorial terms, but also as a means of combatting gender-based violence and implementing cross-cutting social justice reforms.

3. Emakunde, the Basque Equality Law and other developments

While women’s movements in the West matured in the 1960s and 1970s, Spain was only starting to recover from decades of brutal oppression. The transition to democracy and the push for Basque autonomy played an instrumental role in bringing about legal and social changes, which also addressed gender-based discrimination, as well as new economic opportunities for women, even in historically male domains. Basque feminists rallied around the famous second-wave feminist slogan “the personal is political,” and called for the right to divorce, the decriminalisation of female adultery, the legalisation of contraception and abortion, and equal employment opportunities.

Nafarroan women’s commitment to rebuild the structures of a democratic feminist movement was symbolised by the creation of the Feminist Assembly of Navarra in 1976. Two years later, three gynaecologists in Navarre established the pioneering Andraize centre to respond to the needs of a new society in which women began to demand rights and social services in matters of family planning and sexual education. The work and activism of Elisa Sesma, Pablo Sánchez-Valverde and Mari Cruz Landa in the field of sexual and reproductive health came under fire for providing abortions in 1987 by ultra-conservative groups like Acción Familiar, which pressed charges. Today Andraize is seen as a trailblazer in public health and women’s rights at the state level, even as ‘escrache-style demonstrations regularly take place in front of clinics to coerce and threaten women and vandalize facilities.

As a result of these seismic social transformations, and with more women working in political institutions, Basque authorities started to prioritise gender equality in their laws, policies, programmes, and research. The strong demands made by the Basque women’s movement resulted in the establishment of the Basque Women’s Institute or Emakunde in 1988 to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and to achieve real and effective equality between men and women. Today Emakunde is responsible for promoting, advising, planning and overseeing the implementation of equality policies by the Basque autonomous government.

The development and political influence of Emakunde cannot be explained without acknowledging the work and leadership of Txaro Arteaga Ansa. She had been active during the Franco regime in the clandestine feminist movement and was later appointed as Emakunde’s first director. Shortly after its creation, Emakunde assessed the main obstacles hindering gender equality in the Basque Country by consulting with civil society and negotiating with public administrations and political parties. As the director of Emakunde, Txaro Arteaga Ansa launched, promoted and evaluated action plans to be implemented by the Basque public authorities, proposed the application of gender mainstreaming in public policies, which was approved by the Governing Council in 1999, participated in numerous UN conferences and participated in the Commission on the Status of Women as an observer, and drafted the landmark Equality Law, which was adopted by the Basque Parliament in 2005.

Law 4/2005 obliges all Basque public authorities to: (1) have gender equality units, (2) develop and execute gender equality plans, (3) collect gender-segregated data, (4) carry out gender impact assessments, and (5) promote a balanced representation of women and men in decision-making. The legislation has substantially increased the financial and human resources allocated to the promotion of equality, proliferated the use of inclusive language, and expanded the network of services available to women who are at risk of exclusion or who have fallen victim to violence.

Top-down and bottom-up approaches work side-by-side in today’s Basque Country. Women working at the grassroots level formed their own associations, producing a distinct Basque feminist discourse and space for solidarity and support. In Nafarroa, the autonomous women’s organisation Coordinadora Feminista de Navarra continues to address violence against women, access to education, equal pay, and women’s reproductive and sexual rights, while in the BAC, schools for the empowerment of women sprung up to promote the social and political participation of women. Feminist ideas also penetrated Basque academia in the 1980s and 1990s, including in the form of new departments and institutes working on gender and feminist studies.

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12 Crumbly, p. 46.
14 Emakunde, 2018.
15 Called in Basque: Emakumeen ahalduntzerako Eskolai Euskal Autonomia Erkidegoko udalerrietan.
4. Basque women leading the way?

Basque women demonstrate a high level of political engagement and consciousness, particularly with Basque political issues, which is unsurprising considering its turbulent past and tense relationship with Madrid. One respondent specifically acknowledged the vital role women have played in the recognition of Basque issues. In terms of Basque affairs more generally, the majority have participated in political actions, including demonstrations, marches, and campaigns in the past five years.

Most Basque women do not feel that there are any legal restrictions to their participation in political life on the local, regional, state, and European level, but they are acutely aware that bias, stereotypes and a culture of machismo hold women back. Only one respondent explains that she refuses to exercise her right to vote “for repressive reasons,” which may mean that she does not trust political institutions. Basque women report on average feeling freer to participate in politics on the European level than state level. One respondent stated that, “At a European level, taking it as a whole, the presence of women is a little bit higher but insufficient nonetheless. The lack of equality is tantamount to lack of democracy.”

All but one respondent feel that women are not adequately represented in politics, despite the progress made in this area in the Basque Country. One participant explained that women still do not hold key posts. Reconciling home and work, or familial and political life, is a major theme present in their responses. One participant expressed her concern regarding the double standards at play when an activist couple have children, as it is often the woman who abandons her political activities to care for the family, while men rarely make that choice. Interestingly, the subject of the way couple have children, as it is often the woman who abandons her political activities to care for the family, while men rarely make that choice. Interestingly, the subject of the way couple have children, as it is often the woman who abandons her political activities to care for the family, while men rarely make that choice. Interestingly, the subject of the way couple have children, as it is often the woman who abandons her political activities to care for the family, while men rarely make that choice. Interestingly, the subject of the way couple have children, as it is often the woman who abandons her political activities to care for the family, while men rarely make that choice. Interestingly, the subject of the way couple have children, as it is often the woman who abandons her political activities to care for the family, while men rarely make that choice. Interestingly, the subject of the way couple have children, as it is often the woman who abandons her political activities to care for the family, while men rarely make that choice.

On the local level, only twenty-one percent of mayors are women in the BAC.19 To improve these numbers, the Virginia Woolf Basqueskola initiative was launched in 2012 in collaboration with Emakunde and Eudel, the association of Basque municipalities, with the aim of empowering women politicians and promoting networking. One respondent welcomes such initiatives but regrets slow progress and hopes to see more men involved in these campaigns.

The regional representation of women in the BAC exceeds representation levels in other communities. Following the adoption of a 2005 regional parity law requiring a minimum of fifty percent of the candidates to be women. According to the law, the electoral lists to the Basque Parliament and the three provincial parliaments, must have a balanced representation of both sexes (at least forty to sixty percent). In 2005, fifty-two percent of elected Basque legislators were women, the highest representation of women in all communities in Spain at the time. In 2009, the number dropped slightly as women represented forty-five percent of the Basque Parliament. Following the 2016 elections, forty women and thirty-five men took their seats in the new parliament. The rise in overall proportion of women parliamentarians is partially due to the zip list policy of the leftist pro-independence EH Bildu political party, as well as the positive efforts by the Basque branch of PSOE, while Podemos and the two conservative parties, did not achieve parity among their elected candidates.

Moreover, the current President of the Basque Parliament is Bakartxo Tejeria, a member of the Basque National Party. Between 2009 and 2012, Arantza Quiroga from the conservative People’s Party also headed the Basque parliament and was preceded by Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, also from the Basque National Party, who served as the first woman president of the Basque Parliament.

Since the first regional elections in Navarre in 1979, the number of women in parliament has increased, and today women represent the majority with twenty-six out of forty seats. In the Navarre context, BegonaErratziplayedavitalroleasaprominentBasquepoliticianwhoisknownforcombiningherdefenceofBasque autonomy with a progressive approach. She led the Basque Solidarity Party (Eusko Alkartasuna) in the Parliament of Navarre between 1995 and 1999, and in the Basque Parliament between 1999 and 2003, and continued to lead the party until 2007. She broke new ground as the first woman leader of a political party sitting in parliament in Spain.

In the previous legislature, women comprised fifty percent of the BAC executive cabinet, making it one of only two communities in Spain with parity cabinets, but the proportion has dropped to forty percent in 2016. However, no woman has ever been in the position of Lehendakari or President of the BAC. In Navarre, however, the
current President is a woman, Uxue Barkos, a journalist and politician from the Geroa Bai political coalition of Basque nationalist parties, and Yolanda Barcina Angulo from the Union of the Navarrese People proceeded her during the 2011-2015 term.

In terms of political representation on the state level, the situation has demonstrably improved since the Spanish transition to democracy. In 1982, only five percent of the Congress of Deputies in Madrid were women. This number increased to twenty-two percent in 1996 as a result of voluntary party quotas. A decade later, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero’s government passed the 2007 Law on Equality requiring at least forty percent of electoral candidates to be women, which raised the proportion of elected women legislators to thirty-three percent at both regional and national levels. Today, the Congress of Deputies in Madrid is composed of forty-one percent of women – an improvement from thirty-six percent in the previous legislature.

Over the past few decades, several women from Iparralde have been working in the political arena, including Michèle Alliot-Marie who reached high-level political positions in France. Although she was not born in the Basque Country, she played an important role in Basque politics as a leader of the French Gaullists. She started her political career as a town councillor in Ziburu (Ciboure), was later elected as a town councillor in Biarritz, and then finished her municipal duties as mayor of Donibane-Lohizune (Saint-Jean-de-Luz). Meanwhile, she was elected as a member of the French Assembly representing the Department of Atlantic Pyrenees, which includes Iparralde and Béarn, and was re-elected to the position several times. Alliot-Marie has been a minister of the French government, including of Home Affairs and Defence, four times. Moreover, she served as a member of the European Parliament twice, from 1989 to 1993, and from 2014 and 2019. Finally, she was the President of the Gaullist party Rassemblement pour la République from 1999 to 2002.

In Iparraldean partisan politics, prominent women like Argitxu Noblia, were also active. She first joined the Basque National Party in the 1970s and was elected as town councillor of Baiona (Bayonne) in 1989 with the list of the Gaullist Mayor Jean Grenet. Later, she stood as candidate in several elections for both the Basque National Party and Eusko Alkartasuna, but she was never elected. Moreover, Mertxe Kolina and Menane Oxandabaratz have both been spokespersons and members of the board of the biggest Basque national party in Iparralde, the Abertzaleen Batasuna, since its creation in 2001.

On the European level, there are twenty-six women and twenty-eight men MEPs from Spain, but none of them are visibly people of colour or of migrant background. Out of the fifty-four MEPs, six are from the Basque Country, of which three are women, and all differ in their positions on Basque independence, sovereignty, migration, diversity, and how to address the rising far-right movements. At the same time, only thirty-eight percent of MEPs elected from France for the 2014-2019 mandate are women, of which three are women of colour.

Basque women speak about the need to redefine political processes and reform political culture to make it more inclusive to all members of society, including women. One participant explained that more accountability is needed in politics, while another advocates for a radical reset of society, “so that we can re-start the system [with] structures developed according to the needs of both men and women.”

As a group they gave detailed and passionate answers to our questions about the specific challenges faced by Basque women. They suggest improving women’s political representation by radically transforming society, remarking that a patriarchal society cannot be egalitarian, while a feminist and inclusive society would be more just. One respondent noted that politics should be “an exercise of care, listening to people’s needs and work [sic] with them to find the best solutions.” Among their suggestions is the creation of a mechanism that would support women and those who are marginalised by their socioeconomic conditions.

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21 Ortbals, p. 132.
Turkey's first President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk carried out sweeping political, social, and economic reforms aimed at transforming the newly-formed republic into a modern and secular democracy. As part of the state-building process following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the signing of the treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne, ‘Turkishness’ was imposed by the government as a single national identity to the detriment of ethnic and religious minorities coexisting within its borders. Since then Turkey’s state nationalism has deliberately targeted Kurds, both inside its borders and its neighbouring countries, with military force, political repression and cultural assimilation.

The Kurdish women’s movement has gained international visibility in Western media for its women-only military units defending the Kobani, Raqqa, and Afrin enclaves from the terrorist group Daesh. However, Kurdish women have not only been at the forefront of an armed conflict, but also a revolutionary social and political project. Although many Kurdish women still struggle to assert themselves against patriarchal values, the Kurdish women’s movement stands out as an example of contemporary feminist action, which has since the 1990s organised at all levels and equipped itself with structures and tools that are responsive to women’s needs.

Kurdish women’s associations have been a driving force behind recent advances in Kurdish women’s political participation and representation. Towns in Bakurê or Northern Kurdistan have implemented several ground-breaking measures. For example, municipalities have female-male co-mayorship and civil service jobs are reserved for women until gender parity is reached.1 Yet despite these innovative measures, Kurdish women are still often discriminated against on the state level based on their ethnicity, gender, language and socio-economic class, and progress is hindered by the ever-changing Turkish political landscape and the reinforcement of conservative values by the right-wing Justice and Development Party (AKP).

1. The birth of the Kurdish Women’s Movement in Turkey

In the first decades of the twentieth century, women in Turkey were ‘emancipated but unliberated’.1 While women still suffered from inequalities in both private and social life, they also enjoyed some political freedoms like access to universities and work; equal rights to divorce, custody, and inheritance; the ban on women’s religious attire in public institutions and universities; and full universal suffrage from 1934 onwards.2 Despite Atatürk’s notoriety as an open-minded reformer, he deterred women’s political self-organisation. For example, he blocked Nezihe Muhiddin’s trailblazing women’s political party from registering and participating in elections.3

The Turkish women’s movement only re-emerged in the 1980s after the military coup d’état. Turkish feminists aligned themselves with the new wave of Western feminist thought, appealing for real equality both in the public and private spheres, protesting domestic and sexual violence, calling for women’s political representation, and demanding structural changes. The first positive results could be seen in 1983, when abortion became legal in Turkey, and then in 1985, when Turkey signed the UN Convention eliminating discrimination against women, and then again in 1999 with a new law that protected victims of domestic violence. Reforms to the civil code in

1 Nordland, 2016.
2 Akser, 2013.
3 Tekeli, 2010.
4 Arslanbenzer, 2018.
2002 also gave women the right to work without the permission of the spouse and to an equal share of joint assets after divorce.5 Parallel to these developments, and rooted in the 1970s workers' and students' revolts, the Kurdish women's movement grew as women became more active in the wider Kurdish movement. While some women's groups were politically autonomous, others worked closely with the Kurdistan Worker's Party (Pariya Karkerên Kurdistanê – PKK), since they perceived the Kurdish national cause and women's liberation as deeply intertwined.

Inspired by women like Sakine Cansız, the leader of the Kurdish national movement Abdullah Ocalan developed a distinct ideological construction called ‘democratic confederalism’. The aim of democratic confederalism is the emancipation of humanity through the liberation of women, and a commitment to ecology and anti-capitalism. He saw patriarchal structures as elements serving the interests of the Turkish state and strongly believed that allowing women to take part in Kurdish liberation would reinforce the Kurdish national struggle; writing: “Liberating life is impossible without a radical woman’s revolution.”6 Women joined the PKK in growing numbers, because they too had experienced the trauma of state oppression and the party “provided an opportunity to break the social shackles and re-create themselves as first-class subjects.”7 Even women from traditional and rural backgrounds were encouraged to join the Kurdish movement, because the preservation of men’s honour and traditional gender roles was deemed inconsistent with the overall aims.

By 1985, the first women’s military units (Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star – YJA-Star) were being formed. Ayşe Gökkan, a former mayor of Nusaybin, believes that this had a wider implication on the Kurdish women’s movement, saying that “the civilian women’s movement was born from the synergy experienced with the fighters: if those women could organise themselves in the mountains, then it was possible to do the same in the towns.”8 With their headquarters in Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish women trained together, studied feminism and direct democracy, and lived communally. The creation of women’s brigades allowed the PKK to confront patriarchal structures, as well as to “help break up internalized notions of female obedience and servility.”9 By 1993, one-third of the PKK’s armed forces were women.10

The significance of Sakine Cansız extends beyond her co-founding of the PKK together with Abdullah Ocalan. Once the party was established, she travelled from village to village around Bakurê to reach Kurdish women, spread revolutionary ideas, organise meetings, and build solidarity. Despite her imprisonment and torture between 1979 and 1991, Cansız continued to strengthen women’s solidarity by reaching the wives, mothers and sisters of prisoners, and by leading a protest movement from inside the prison.

2. Kurdish women’s activism: from grassroots to political institutions

The Kurdish women’s movement flourished into an inclusive movement that integrates women of different cultures and professions, and works beyond political parties and Kurdish nationalist ideas, which dominated in the 1980s and 90s. Established in 2003, the Democratic Free Women’s Movement (Demokratîk Özgûr Kadinê Hareketi’nin – DÖKH) comprised of not only Kurdish women, but also Middle Eastern women from different social, cultural and political backgrounds with the aim of eradicating gender inequality, racism, militarism, social injustice and environmental degradation.

Kurdish women have played a fundamental role during the 2012-13 peace negotiations between the PKK and Turkey. DÖKH emphasized social inequalities, promoted a sustainable and holistic vision of peace, and argued against the current exploitative, capitalist and patriarchal system. When the ruling AKP party announced that it would set up a truth commission but failed to invite any women to join, DÖKH used its leverage and refused to concede to a truth commission that did not foresee their involvement.11 The stakes were high for women in this peace process due to their infamous double bind as Kurdish women.

A growing, heterogeneous but united movement of Kurdish women in Bakurê formed the Congress of Free Women (Kongreya Jinen Azad – KJA) in 2015 as a “democratic and confederative umbrella of women against a unitary and centralised, capitalistic and modernist Nation-State,”12 and as an “organ of common solidarity, of self-empowerment and of autonomy for women of all creeds, cultures and societies of

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1 BBC, 2002.
2 Ocalan, 2013.
3 Utku Bila, 2013.
4 Hevalno, 2017.
5 De Jong, 2016.
6 Öcalan, 2013.
7 Utku Bila, 2013.
8 Hevalno, 2017.
9 De Jong, 2016.
10 Letsch, 2013.
11 de Swarte and Sellar, 2014.
12 Hevalno, 2017.
Minority women in politics

peoples living in Mesopotamia.”13 The KJA brought together women’s neighbourhood councils, elected women politicians, women’s organisations, activists, lawyers, teachers etc., who organised themselves via committees on a broad range of issues like the communal economy, women’s work, literacy classes, political education, social issues, justice, human rights, ecology, and the media.

Among political parties, the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi – BDP) strongly embraced gender equality and had high numbers of women among its ranks. The BDP was concerned not only with Kurdish self-determination, but also with promoting the rights of women, LGBTQI persons, and other ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, such as the Alevis and the Laz. The BDP also had a fifty percent quota for women candidates, a co-leadership scheme shared between a man and a woman, as well as a separate movement for women within the party. According to de Swarte and Sellar, “what makes Kurdish politics in Turkey different is that actual structures of the political party have been changed to ensure equality between women and men.”14

In Kurdish municipalities where BDP had been in power, local authorities set up innovative projects that would support the empowerment of women. Gülbahar Örnek, the BDP mayor of the historic neighbourhood of Sûr in Amed, spent the first six months of her mandate reaching out to women and asking them about their needs. Based on their answers, her municipality established art studios, Kurdish language schools, and workshops on hygiene, women’s history, and worker’s rights. Laundries were set up to provide a space where women could wash clothes for free and talk to other women, while their children were looked after by teachers who spoke Kurdish to them.15 BDP municipalities also set up counselling centres, where women could find legal and psychological assistance.

The Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP) stands out for its adoption of a non-violent strategy and for participating in the Turkish political system with considerable electoral success in recent years. Founded in 2012 as a coalition of Kurdish and left-wing groups, the HDP has worked to combat the discrimination of ethnic and religious minorities and promote radical and direct democracy based on civil liberties, women’s rights and political pluralism.16 Since the 2016 failed coup,

the HDP has also been targeted by the government, whose purges of the political opposition have led to the imprisonment of numerous leaders and members of the party. This has deeply undermined HDP’s capacity to meaningfully participate in politics.17

HDP’s inclusive and feminist ideology, mindful of both women and sexual minorities, is both unique and revolutionary among major parties in Turkey, since other major parties only nominate token numbers of women. The HDP has a Women’s Congress, which not only mainstreams gender issues into the party program, but also encourages women to run for elections and vets all female candidates. To increase women’s representation in politics, HDP halved the application fee for female election candidates and took measures to prevent women from being listed at the bottom of candidate lists.

HDP has not only brought the voices of unrepresented minorities to the forefront of the political stage, but also united many across ethnicities and the religious divide to block Erdoğan and his party from instating one-man rule. This position, however, comes with great difficulties. The current political landscape in Turkey makes it extremely difficult for citizens to support the HDP without being considered terrorists, because of the party’s alleged links to the outlawed PKK.

3. Kurdish feminism in a fragile political context

Erdoğan and his party have been accused of spreading an increasingly traditionalist and backward-looking view of women. The party’s public disapproval of birth control, family planning, abortions, caesarean sections, childless women, and divorce speaks volumes about the current hostile climate for women’s rights in Turkey. Although legislative proposals to make it legal for men to rape girls if they marry their victims and for doctors to be able to refuse to perform abortions were not formally adopted, they have greatly influenced the way health professionals approach girl’s and women’s reproductive and sexual health. These discursive and legislative developments, in addition to the AKP’s abolition of the Ministry of Women in 2011, represent a worrying backward step that has contributed to rising violence against women, and gaps between anti-violence law and implementation.

17 Human Rights Watch, 2017
The current war-like atmosphere and increasing government pressure in Northern Kurdistan has a particularly devastating impact on Kurdish women and their rights. Firstly, violence against women is rising rapidly throughout Turkey, but violence against Kurdish women also has a political dimension. One participant in our study talked about the issue of “putting the lifeless bodies of Kurdish women and their underwear on the walls of destroyed houses in Cizre on display.” She was referring to the case of Taybet İnan, a fifty-seven-year-old mother whose body was left in the streets of Silopi’s Nuh neighbourhood for seven days after she had been killed. She became a symbol of the plight of Kurdish civilians.

Secondly, the collapse of civil society under Erdoğan has also led to countless Kurdish women’s organisations receiving government-issued requests for closure or searches without proper warrants. Following the shutdown of the feminist news agency Jinha, Roja Öğuz said: “What the AKP wants to say with its attacks is, ‘I killed you, I murdered you, and now I am stopping you from telling anyone about it.’” Similarly, in November 2016, after four raids by the Turkish police under the new state of emergency rule, the Turkish state entered the KJA offices in Diyarbakır, shutting down the building and suspending their activities. Its spokeswoman Ayla Akat Ata was also detained. The KJA statement after the closure read: “These state assaults on us women will never discourage us! /…/ we will continue our resistance with escalating determination and steadfastness!”

4. Kurdish women’s political engagement today

The women who participated in our study report a very high level of engagement with Kurdish affairs, women’s issues, and issues facing women from the Kurdish community with eight of the interviewed women claiming to have participated in direct political or cultural action concerning their community. However, considering the restrictive political climate and ongoing government crackdowns on Kurdish civil society organisations, it is unsurprising that only three out of eleven participants are members of a political party.

Kurdish women explain that it is increasingly difficult for them to express themselves and their concerns directly for fear of repression. One respondent explains that her personal involvement in political and cultural actions has changed as of late: “Police attacks and restrictions have increased in recent times, making it very difficult even to hold a gathering. I very rarely participate and in fact there are few such protests, and the ones that are held are small-scale. At the time when the domestic security bill was introduced, when the curfews had not yet begun but signs were pointing that way, I participated very often. Other than protests, I participate in activities to collect aid and raise awareness.”

Several participants mention legal obstacles and prejudice against Kurds as hampering their political participation, but the majority agrees that prejudice against women is the main barrier for them. One participant reveals that social structures are “more oppressive for women.” While Kurdish women have made significant progress, particularly in urban areas, – they are active in political parties, grassroots and civil society organisations, and are also better represented in politics than their Turkish counterparts – there are still important obstacles to full empowerment and equality.

Correspondingly, education and politics are the two areas where Kurdish women feel that the use of their language is the most restricted. Elections, however, are the one area where Kurdish women are most likely to express their political will. All but one declare having voted in the past five years, most of them voting in all elections on local, parliamentary, and presidential levels.

Based on their answers, Kurdish women’s voting appears to be slightly more influenced by the challenges facing their community than women’s issues. Violence against Kurds ranks highly on their list of concerns. As one woman reminds us, conflicts with the Turkish state have cost thousands of lives and put thousands more in jail, and the fear of losing loved ones to the fight against injustice is very real for them. Kurds in Turkey are also disproportionately affected by “unemployment, migration (for economic or political reasons), forced displacement and imprisonment, and work in physical jobs – that the majority of society do not do – in poor conditions,” notes another woman. Nevertheless, Kurdish women also perceive Kurdish and women’s issues to be closely linked. One Kurdish woman explains that “the women’s struggle can be carried out together with the struggle of the downtrodden nation.”

A big threat to Kurdish women’s rights arguably comes from the Turkish state, which retains an extremely conservative stance on women’s role in society. It has imprisoned Kurdish feminist activists and politicians, closed women’s associations, and sowed division among Turkey’s ethnic communities. Considering that in 2014 seventy percent

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10 Sims, 2016.
of DÖKH’s leaders were in prison, one could argue that it deliberately and openly acts against Kurdish women’s rights. These measures have also made it difficult for Kurdish women to create links with their Turkish counterparts.

Most Kurdish women rank violence against women as a top priority. “Kurdish women still suffer from child marriages, bride exchanges, and forced marriages to elderly people”, remarks a survey participant who says that she has observed first-hand the damage that these practices cause. “As a Kurdish woman I do not want to be subjected to such treatment or prejudice,” she adds. Another Kurdish woman clarifies that these issues are actually being discussed in Kurdish provinces and grassroots organisations, while in the rest of the country, women’s issues are discussed only in general terms.

Women in Turkey not only face great difficulty in affirming their political rights, their representation in politics is still far from equal. Although Kurdish women have seen their presence in political life grow, they express feeling unrepresented in politics, both as Kurds and as women.

Turkey’s 1935 legislature remarkably welcomed seventeen women into parliament. However, women’s representation has been growing at a snail’s pace ever since. By 2007, women represented only nine percent of the Turkish parliament, and by 2015 only fifteen percent. Early elections in June 2018 saw 904 women from seven political parties running for elections. Women today represent seventeen percent of lawmakers in Turkey on the state level.

Moreover, the June 2015 legislative elections were historic, since for the first time in history a pro-Kurdish party passed the ten percent threshold limiting parties’ entry into the Turkish parliament. The HDP won thirteen percent of the popular vote, bringing thirty-one women – almost one third of all elected women – into Turkey’s male-dominated parliament. In the June 2018 legislative elections HDP also had the highest number of women candidates compared to other parties. In the current parliament, women make up eighteen percent of AKP’s deputies and thirty-seven percent of HDP’s deputies.

These advances have been largely due to the HDP’s equality-driven policy introducing a fifty percent gender quota, ten percent LGBT quota and a system of co-leadership at all levels of the party. Additionally, the HDP is the only party that has a ‘declaration on women’, calls itself a ‘women’s party’, and has promised a ministry for women’s affairs that would specifically address femicide and institutional gender discrimination. It also advocates for gender-sensitive and positive discrimination policies until full equality is achieved.

Notably, Kurdish women appear to welcome the fact that the problems faced by Kurdish women are sometimes treated separately by the international community, which could explain why most respondents feel better represented in international rather than Turkish politics.

Most of the respondents give suggestions to increase and improve the political representation of Kurdish women and these can be divided into three categories: mental change, institutional change, and structural change. Indeed, the obstacles Kurdish women face are of different orders, and changing mentalities would, for example, include addressing stereotypes about minority women, traditional attitudes to strict gender roles, inadequate education, and what is perceived as a lack of solidarity among women.

Institutions are changing slowly, for instance, with the advent of quotas within political parties. One participant explained: “the co-chair system that was introduced by one political party (the HDP) is also implemented in other Kurdish cultural organisations. As a specific quota is obligatory, even if you are reluctant you cannot have any women.” The nature of government itself can be a structural obstacle to minority women’s representation. One participant noted that “governments either need to be brought down or to be reorganised from scratch”.

Although one respondent does not believe that having more women in politics will contribute to solving problems facing Kurds because “female politicians are not interested in Kurdish culture”, others look to role models for inspiration. Four respondents cite Kurdish women who struggle (or have struggled) for Kurdish rights and self-determination like Sakine Cansız, Gülser Yıldırım, Leyla Imret, Ayşe Başaran Acar, Arin Mirkan, as well as Leyla Zana, a symbol of the Kurdish women’s movement and the first Kurdish woman to win a seat in the Turkish parliament in 1991, the year the Kurdish language was legalised in Turkey. She won the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1995 but only collected her prize in 2004 after her release from prison.

Indeed, the emerging role of Kurdish women is impressive considering the sexist social reality in Turkey, and its stark contrast to the rising religious and social conservatism globally.

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20 Ibid.
21 De Swarte and Sellar, 2014.
Brittany: A history of collective resistance

By Dr Justine Séran

Brittany, also known as Breizh in Breton, has a long history of regionalism and cultural resistance. From the second half of the 19th century, and especially under the Third Republic, France led a policy of linguistic and cultural homogenisation across the territory, implemented through the public school system and the military service. Breton language and culture are still under threat as a result of this unbridled francisation, despite local efforts to preserve and transmit Breton heritage to future generations. Bretons have recently reclaimed their collective identity in positive terms with many still retaining a culture of resistance to French social, political, economic, and cultural hegemony.

The French constitution has traditionally relied on a generalised concept of equality and displayed reluctance to recognize groups with specific needs like women, minorities, migrants, and people with disabilities. French institutions have shied away from dividing into categories what they consider the abstract and indivisible concept of ‘citizen’. The French state has largely taken a conservative approach to anti-discrimination measures, neglecting cultural and regional dynamics, power and class dynamics, citizenship status, and race or ethnicity within the context of a plurinational and multicultural state.

1. The ‘Breton matriarchy’: still present in the collective conscience?

The term ‘Breton matriarchy’ was first coined in 1984 by Agnes Audibert in her ethnographic study of a rural community north of Brest. Her research looked at the way historical specificities of Breton society have shaped the notion of a matriarchal Brittany. Contributing factors to support the hypothesis of women’s social, administrative, and economic power as an ethno-cultural specificity of Brittany are its social systems, including uxorilocality, a system where married couples reside with the parents of the bride; bilinear transmission, a system where the cultural heritage of both parents is transmitted to the children; and partible inheritance, a system that divides the inheritance equally among all children.

Although Breton women did not hold primary power positions in family, economic, social or political life, their lives did diverge from their European counterparts in many ways. While most other European women were not legally entitled to any assets or opportunities, married Breton women retained their dowry, inheritance, and all property acquired throughout marriage. The latter was held in the community and administered by her husband, but upon widowhood, Breton women could use this property freely in addition to any property owned before marriage. Breton women could also separate from their husbands, although they rarely did so. In
most cases the basis for the application was the “husband’s brutality”.7 However, in the 18th century, divorce was still extremely difficult in other parts of Europe, including Britain. Another factor that distinguished Brittany from other parts of Europe is the high number of female-headed households. At the time, between a fifth and up to a third of households were led by a woman, including single women.8 This is most likely linked to the egalitarian Breton inheritance system. Elsewhere in Europe, female-headed households were still rare, and more common in cities where there were greater economic opportunities for women. This was not the case in Brittany as female-headed households have been recorded in both urban and rural contexts.

In economic life, Breton women did not work exclusively in the domestic sphere as was the case in other parts of Europe, but also worked in supervisory and professional jobs. Indeed, “the Breton married woman had a more clearly defined right to trade than the British woman,” because she could work without her husband’s authorisation. Locklin’s research shows that Breton women received remuneration for their work at all social levels and stages of life, and their familial obligations seemed to have no impact on their working lives.

Distinctive features of Breton history – such as the fact that men were often at sea or war – could have enabled women to be present in the public sphere in unprecedented ways. However, as Yvon Tranvouez notes, Breton women’s social dominance could have been inflated when Audibert conducted her study in the 1980s, since contemporary social issues like depopulation among Breton men and youth unemployment have recently destabilised traditional social structures.10

2. Recent progress in the political sphere

French women have only been able to vote and serve in office since 1944, significantly later than in other countries included in this study. Not only did women in France have a later start in politics, progress was also limited for decades. In 1945, women represented just five percent of deputies at the National Assembly, and by 1996, their numbers rose only negligibly to six percent, despite President Jacques Chirac’s Observatory of Parity. Following the dismissal by Prime Minister Alain Juppé of eight of the twelve women in his government only six months after their appointment in 1995, women published a manifesto demanding that the concept of political parity be enshrined in the French constitution.

At the turn of the century in Europe, only Greece had fewer women parliamentarians than France, and women’s representation was even lower at the local level with just eight percent of mayors being women and most of them serving in villages of less than 700 people.11 France has had only one female prime minister, Edith Cresson, who “survived eleven months in office—the shortest duration ever—and from day one faced strong sexist hostility.”12

A book published in 1992 entitled “Take Power, Female Citizens: Liberty, Equality, Parity” by Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber, and Anne le Gall prepared the way for legal reforms. Chief among these legislative advances were the amendments to articles three and four of the French Constitution in 1999 and a law adopted in 2000 promoting equal access for men and women to elected positions. Political parties must now present an equal number of men and women candidates in municipal, legislative and European elections, and to guarantee that women are not placed at the bottom of electoral lists.

These legislative developments led to a dramatic increase in the number of women elected as regional councillors, from a national average of twenty-seven percent in 1996 to forty-seven percent in 2004, and in Brittany specifically, from twenty-two percent to fifty-one percent.13 However, achieving political parity divided public opinion. Several prominent women like Elisabeth Badinter, Evelyne Pisier, and Danièle Sallenave also voiced their opposition to forced parity and defended a gender-blind approach.14 Nevertheless, women have made substantial progress in the political sphere in the early 21st century. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, of the 577 newly elected lawmakers, 223 or thirty-nine percent are women, beating the previous record of 155 or twenty-seven percent after the last election.15
In 2012, the first Minister for Women’s Rights, Najat Vallaud Belacem, introduced the Gender Equality Bill stipulating a wide range of measures that would address equality in the workplace, improve protection from domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, combat sexist stereotypes in media, ensure women’s sexual autonomy, fight the gender pay gap, promote shared parental leave, and increase women’s political, social and professional representation. While some measures were concrete and practical, others were geared towards changing social attitudes over time. The bill was approved in 2014. While the new law represented a step forward, it nevertheless missed an opportunity to integrate an intersectional approach.

These positive policy developments in favour of women’s equality and political representation took place within an international context of pressure with the EU providing a major impetus for anti-discrimination provisions. Yet as Defossez notes, legal advances have their limitations and social attitudes and roles have not changed significantly enough to allow for effective equality in the political domain.

Gendered language, machismo, gendered stereotypes, and sexist microaggressions are still common in the political landscape. Moreover, women are more likely to be confined to sectors considered ‘feminine’ and many political decisions even reinforce stereotypes. For example, the Ministry for Women’s Rights has been recently incorporated into the Ministry of Family, Childhood, and Women’s Rights, and by doing so, the state fortified the traditional link between women and the domestic sphere.

Opello examined the correlation between parity laws in France and women-friendly policies and found that in Brittany a correlation can be established between women’s representation and the governing political ideology. After nearly twenty years of right-wing rule, in 2004 more women than men were elected to the regional council, and a ruling coalition of communists, socialists, leftists, and greens was formed, while the two right-wing parties took the opposition. Nevertheless, as regional councils in France function like parliaments, albeit with limited authority and budgets, both men and women officeholders tend to vote along party lines rather than individual preferences.

As of 2018, the Regional Council of Brittany (RCB) is composed of forty women out of eighty-three, among which twenty-seven are elected under a left-wing coalition, including two women from the left-wing autonomist coalition, and thirteen under a centre-right coalition. This level of representation is on par with the French average of forty-eight percent but is slightly undermined by the fact that most top candidates were men, in addition to the fact that the RCB has yet to elect a woman as president.

This is reflective of the state-wide pattern in women’s political representation: “Although forty percent of municipal counselors are women, only sixteen percent of them are mayors, and if women do represent forty-eight and fifty percent of departmental and regional counselors, respectively, only ten percent are president of a department and not more than seventeen percent preside over a region.”

In Brittany, policies aimed at women can be divided into three categories: gender mainstreamed policies, specific measures to advance women’s status and quality, and women-friendly funding decisions. Regarding the political participation and representation of Breton women, the most salient policy is the gender parity of local councillors, nominated by mayors and state administrators assigned to the region. The creation of a Regional Council on Gender Equality in 2005 enshrined this principle of gender parity in local politics by gathering regional actors – including elected officials, government officers, and representatives of interest groups – to identify and fight inequality in the region. That same year, the RCB revived the regional parity observatory “created in the mid-1990s to promote the equal participation of men and women in political, social, and economic life and to integrate the principle of equality in all public policies.”

Since the executive branch oversees the drafting of policies, the president of the region holds significant power to advance or hinder women’s participation and representation in politics. In 2004, newly-elected President Le Drian made parity a priority in his cabinet and nominated eight women to eighteen top positions. One such vice-president is Gaelle Abily, who was quoted saying that, ‘gender parity in the regional council and its executives gave Brittany ‘visibility and legitimacy,’ and made gender equality in politics ‘more normal’.”

As Opello puts it, “the Breton ratification of EU and UN agreements in conjunction with the ideology of the council’s left-wing governing parties and the national government’s Equality Charter created a favourable political context at the regional,

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16 Conseil Régional de Bretagne
17 Pouchard, 2015
18 Defossez, 2017
19 Opello, 2008, p.329
20 Opello, 2008, p.330
21 Opello, 2008, p.333
national, and international levels for women-friendly policy making in Brittany. While parity laws may not necessarily correlate with more women-friendly policies, women entering the RCB have led to a new atmosphere and a favourable context for new forms of local policymaking to emerge in Brittany.

3. Breton women’s political engagement

Breton women feel free to participate in community, local, and regional politics, but this is markedly not the case at national and European levels. This is unsurprising considering the fact that only thirty-eight percent of MEPs elected from France for the 2014-2019 mandate were women, of which three are also women of colour. Nine MEPs were elected from Brittany, Pays-de-Loire and Poitou-Charente, of which only three are women, one from the National Front party, one from the socialist party, and one from the republican party. This means that pro-autonomy Breton women have no representative on the European level.

Although most Breton women appear alienated from these political spheres, they do vote in most elections. A deep mistrust in the political field pushes some of them towards the voluntary sector, while one even mentions fear of reprisals.

Our respondents who mention Breton as their mother tongue also report being forced to assimilate linguistically, while others regret not speaking Breton fluently as its transmission was forbidden by the state. One participant recalls being beaten, publicly humiliated, and given additional chores for speaking Breton at school. This method fostered negative associations with the Breton language and undermined any sense of solidarity. Breton women today are not only concerned about language revival and protection, they are also politically involved in local grassroots associations and protest movements linked with environmental and social justice concerns.

While the majority of Breton women who participated in our study are not members of a political party, they are highly involved in local cultural associations, including the Bonnets Rouges, which started as a protest movement in 2013 against social dumping and the taxation of heavy goods vehicles. Today the group is called “Vivre, decider et travailler en Bretagne”, and it is focused on keeping jobs and production in Brittany.

Breton women are politically engaged on a number of issues that concern their community: the protection of the Breton language as it currently does not have official status; the reunification of Brittany and the Loire-Atlantique department, including the former capital-city of Nantes, which is currently in Pays de la Loire region; and opposition against the airport project at Notre-Dame-des-Landes. All issues listed as important to Breton women are issues that politically position them against French territorial, economic, and social organisation.

Among the obstacles to political participation, Breton women cite prejudices against the Breton community more often than discrimination against women. The majority responded that Breton women and men faced the same difficulties and insisted that they would care about problems specific to Breton women if they felt that these existed.

One participant even stated that she feels uncomfortable identifying herself as a woman in the survey and prefers to identify as Breton, adding that the main challenge for her lies in being heard when Bretons as a community demand the right to speak their language and protect their territory against the encroachment of predatory businesses.

In terms of the challenges faced by their community and their impact on voting habits, Breton women are keen to point out the lack of recognition of France’s minority cultures and regional languages. Language revival and protection are salient issues for many Breton women who advocate for education reform geared towards more comprehensive teaching of Breton language history. Breton women hope that education will foster interest and pride in Breton culture among young people and future generations.

Another respondent even expresses the hope that this survey will contribute to raising awareness at the European level of the treatment of regional minorities in France, and lead to international sanctions and legislation in favour of regional cultures and languages.

Nevertheless, a couple of respondents do support gender equality and note that women are still struggling, especially in the workforce. Opinions also remain divided between those who approve of parity quotas, as well as those who see gender equality as a matter of uprooting patriarchal structures and those who see it as a question of individual empowerment. One respondent recommended implementing a combination of locally-implemented programmes as a strategy for improving Breton women’s political representation.

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22 Opello, 2008, p.336-7
23 This was done through the use of “ar vuoc’h” (Breton for “the cow”), an object that the teacher would give a pupil who was caught speaking their language. Whoever was in possession of the object at the end of a specific period would be punished.
Western Thrace: A case for multidimensional equality

By Dr Justine Séran

Western Thrace is a relatively small region situated in the northeastern part of Greece and is one of the poorest and least developed parts of Europe with a large rural population working mainly in the agricultural sector. With no accurate statistical information, it is estimated that a third or 120,000 people living in Western Thrace are Muslim Turks, mainly in the prefectures of Xanthi and Rhodopi.\(^1\) With the transition from Ottoman to Greek administration in the 1920s, Turks living in Western Thrace gained Greek citizenship and an officially recognized religious minority status.\(^2\) The benefits of full Greek and EU citizenship should be an advantage for the community, but the reality is very different, however, especially since the Greek government maintains that the official status of the group is merely religious, ignoring their wish to assert their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic rights.\(^3\) Casting the minority as merely religious allows Greece to pay lip service to international treaties on the protection of minority rights and bail out on its responsibilities in terms of ethnic and linguistic integration. Today, Western Thrace is caught between competitive interstate relations. The issues faced by the region are closely linked to tensions between the Greek and Turkish states.

Muslim-Turkish women find themselves at the intersections of patriarchal structures, conservative cultural norms, anti-minority discrimination, the rural-urban divide, as well as gendered austerity measures and rising far-right movements. These systems of oppression hinder minority women’s educational and occupational mobility, leaving them underrepresented at all levels of governance. The experiences of Sabiha Suleiman and Sibel Mustafaoğlulu demonstrate that conservative, anti-Muslim and anti-women forces are actively keeping minority women out of politics in Greece, while “the Greek legal system leaves little space for the recognition of multidimensional equality as a general legal principle.”\(^4\)

1. The Greek context

While second wave feminism brought new rights and opportunities to many women elsewhere, under the Greek military dictatorship between 1967 and 1974 women’s organisations were outlawed and progress was slow. The authoritarian regime’s national project was premised on the sanctity of the family, and women’s social or political participation was denounced unless it fit with the exaltation of motherhood peddled by the regime.\(^5\) Then, with the transition to democracy, women’s participation in the democratic project was further weakened by clientelism, locking out women’s organizations that did not ally themselves with political parties.\(^6\) Issues remain even though the principle of equality of the sexes was established by the 1975 Greece Constitution, and developed further by revisions in 2001, establishing the State’s obligation to take appropriate measures to eliminate all discrimination. For example, particularly alarming is the law that exempts perpetrators who commit sexual violence if they marry their victim, if they are in a sexual relationship, or if the girl is ‘too young’ to consent.\(^7\) Unsurprisingly therefore,

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\(^1\) Arna Paraskevopoulou, 2002, p. 165
\(^2\) Hüseyinoğlu, 2012, pp. 87-110, p. 88
\(^3\) Avagoustou, 2000, p. 103
\(^4\) Kofinis, 2011
\(^5\) Vouloukos, p. 133, 52
\(^6\) Vouloukos, p. 110
\(^7\) Equality Now, 2017
CEDAW has expressed its dismay at the “the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society,” which it understands as “a root cause of violence against women, as well as of the disadvantaged position of women in a number of areas, including in all sectors of the labour market and in political and public life.”

The impact of the economic crisis in Greece and the subsequent austerity measures has left more than a quarter of women jobless. In 2016, twenty-eight percent of women were unemployed compared to nineteen percent of men. The rate of unemployment is even more striking among young women, since more than half of young women did not work in 2016. Taking into account the fact that Greece’s gender pay gap is about twenty percent in the private sector and seven percent in the public sector, recent wage cuts have had devastating consequences for women and their families, especially for single mothers and women-headed households. At the same time, vital support has been stripped away from those who need it most, especially women, the elderly, people with disabilities and special needs. Moreover, cutbacks in public care and health services place a greater burden on women to shoulder much-needed but unpaid care work due to closures in public kindergartens, hospitals and other institutions. As a result of the economic crisis and the Greek government’s decision to cut public funding for women’s shelters, domestic violence has also risen.

Mainstream social beliefs and practices still make it difficult for Greek and minority women to effectively influence decision-makers or penetrate the corporate system. The political decision-making arena still “does not accommodate pluralism and women’s demands have often been construed as having no political merit.” Up to seventy-three percent of women think that the main obstacle for women politicians is the scepticism they face because of their gender.

Local politics seems to be a more popular area of involvement for women. Despite a decrease in the number of Greek women elected to the national parliament and the European Parliament between 2012 and 2015, one can trace a simultaneous increase in the number of women mayors and local and regional governors and councillors. This is perhaps because of legislation introduced in 2001, which allowed quotas to be introduced to electoral lists for prefectural and municipal elections. However, women remain underrepresented as no training programmes have been provided to help local institutions adapt to the quotas system. One positive step forward was Law 3852/2010, which restructured regional and local government bodies with new regional committees on gender equality, which would gender mainstream all programmes, and add new units for social policy and gender equality policies, which would be tasked with preventing and combating gender-based violence, addressing stereotypes, promoting women’s employment, regulating the work-life balance, and facilitating women in political decision-making.

On the local level Greece also implemented gender trainings, targeting women councilors, candidates in regional and local elections, and social workers by training them in political decision-making, communication skills, and European and national gender equality issues in the hope of increasing the number of women participating in politics. However, while some positive results were achieved, one of the weaknesses of the programme was that it did “not meet everybody’s needs, and a particular difference was observed between women from urban and rural areas.”

Amid economic woes, political instability and corruption, the recent rise of far-right and ultra-nationalist groups like Golden Dawn, whose expressed political aims include the complete Hellenization of Western Thrace, has contributed to making the political climate even less attentive to the needs of the Turkish Muslim minority. Golden Dawn, which enjoys the support of approximately ten percent of the electorate, has an openly racist, nativist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim ideology. The arrival of refugees has further boosted their support base as “as a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment has spread in financially devastated Greece.” Human rights abuses against the Turkish Muslim minority go unchallenged with no legal recognition of the ethnic minority group, limited awareness about minority rights among Greek politicians and the general population, and hostility from far-right forces towards immigrants and minorities.
2. Disadvantaged on multiple fronts

Women belonging to the Turkish-Muslim minority in Greece experience distinct disadvantage based on their gender, minority status, ethno-religious identity, social class, and the rural-urban divide, which “classifies Muslim women as probably the most oppressed social group in Greece.” The rights of minority women in Western Thrace are systematically made inferior to the general discussions on the minority rights, which is problematic considering that “the exclusion and subordination experienced by Muslim women in Greece is quite distinct from that suffered by the male members of the minority.” In its reports CEDAW expressed concern that “ethnic minority groups, in particular Roma and Muslim women, continue to face multiple forms of discrimination with respect to access to education, employment and health care,” and noted as its first point of concern, “that women themselves, especially those in rural and remote areas and women belonging to minorities, are not aware of their rights under the Convention, and lack the necessary information to claim their rights.”

In the public sphere the use of Turkish is relatively restricted, with all but two respondents reporting being forced to use Greek, instead of their mother tongue. Whereas the participants feel comfortable using their native language of Turkish within the community, the areas where they cannot use it at include education, politics, and anywhere outside of Western Thrace. The closing of minority schools in Western Thrace, which does not take into account the distance between villages with minority populations, has made the attainment of secondary education even more strenuous, especially for girls who are caught between ethnic-religious discrimination and patriarchal values. With only around 140 minority secular primary schools and two minority religious schools still open, many minority girls from the Turkish Muslim and Roma communities only have two options: go to majority Greek Christian schools where their education mobility is limited or drop out altogether because their families do not allow them to attend a non-minority school.

Women in Western Thrace are further disadvantaged in the labour market due to lack of education, traditional social structures (both Greek Orthodox and Turkish Muslim), insufficient knowledge of the Greek language, and at times, for their dress. Respondents acknowledge that Turkish minority women are being discriminated against because of their visible religious affiliation as some employers “exhibit hostility toward Muslim women employees who refuse to remove their headscarves at work.” This bias against minority women pushes them into jobs in the agricultural and industrial sectors with limited options for professional mobility. According to our questionnaires, it is also present in hospital, courts, and other public spaces: “When we went to cafes or bars around the town square wearing our scarves the waiters would come and tell us that the owner of the shop did not want women dressed in this way and asked us to leave.” Several respondents also point at difficult family pressures: “the minority woman is a servant in the home, a mother to her children, a wife to her husband,” claims a respondent, hinting at strict gender roles within the community.

Greek authorities have yet to formulate or implement policies to address the multidimensional disadvantage experienced by women in Western Thrace, but they are quick to blame Islam or traditional family structures as the cause of women’s lower level of educational achievement and confinement to the domestic sphere. This accusation is disingenuous and limited, because it shifts blame for issues that are state-wide phenomena like patriarchal values and institutions, gender-based violence, economic failure, and austerity. It also conveniently omits the fact that the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne provided the community with exceptional rights, which the Greek state interpretes to imply the necessary acceptance and recognition of Islamic law in cases of family disputes, a surprising fact considering that the church and state are officially separate in Greece. This interpretation by the Greek state means that three state-appointed muftis act as religious leaders and arbiters of sharia law on issues pertaining to marriage, divorce and inheritance. The official position of the Greek state is that “there is no going back on the Lausanne treaty, for fear of retaliation against the Greek community in Istanbul,” even if the price to pay are women’s rights in the domain of family law.

This application of Islamic law to all family and inheritance disputes of Greek citizens who are Muslim-Turks “constitutes a distinct form of discrimination.
against the women of the minority of Western Thrace.\textsuperscript{32} Even though the muftis of Western Thrace follow the most liberal Islamic Law School, several provisions are discriminatory towards women, including the unconditional right to divorce for men (women can apply for divorce in specific cases), and larger inheritance for male descendants. The case of Chatitze Molla Sali v. Greece first brought attention to the issue of Islamic religious law in Greece, when Molla Sali’s late husband left her his entire estate following his passing, but the sisters of the deceased challenged the will, stating that “their brother had belonged to the Thrace Muslim community and that all matters relating to his estate were therefore subject to Islamic law and to the jurisdiction of the mufti rather than to the provisions of the Greek Civil Code”.\textsuperscript{33} Molla Sali was the first woman from Western Thrace to have taken a case to the European Court of Human Rights.

3. Minority women’s political engagement in Western Thrace and beyond

Rural and minority women in Greece have been structurally excluded from decision-making and political power. Although a slight majority of respondents feel free to participate in the politics of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, this number decreases at national levels, and even more dramatically at European levels. Correspondingly, all but two respondents have voted in recent elections, mostly at local and parliamentary levels, but only six of them declare voting in European elections.

Political engagement is evenly spread, with a little below half of the respondents declaring membership to a political party, and over half being members of associations to promote the minority culture. Women from Western Thrace express a strong feeling of belonging to the Turkish community and a willingness to play a part in their affairs.

Wider patriarchal and anti-minority structures, including mainstream media and political parties, actively (re)produce inequalities. Sabiha Suleiman, a Muslim Roma woman and a candidate for the 2014 European Parliament elections with the leftist party Syriza, experienced this firsthand when she was smeared by mainstream media. Despite her strong commitment to the rights of Roma children and women, and her many years of experience working in education, her candidacy was retracted by Syriza, only to be replaced by Dimitris Christopoulous, who went on record to say that he had done his best to block Suleiman. According to Tzafalias, Syriza put labour activist and Bulgarian migrant woman Kostadinka Kuneva on the same European ballot, so that “striking Suleiman off could in no way be perceived as an attempt at assuaging possibly bigoted Greek voters.”\textsuperscript{34}

There is a worrying lack of role models for young girls in Western Thrace as the majority of our respondents replied “no” to the question about whether they look up to an inspiring woman in their community. A few women from Western Thrace revealed that Sibel Mustafaoğlu, the first woman from the minority group to be a candidate for a mayoral position, inspired them.

Actively challenging the stereotypes leveraged against Muslim-Turkish minority women, Sibel Mustafaoğlu was previously elected to the Rodopi local council, later appointed as its Vice-Prefect, and ran as a candidate for the 2009 European Parliament elections on the Panhellenic Socialist Movement list. Like Suleiman, when Mustafaoğlu was being considered for the position of Head of the Komotini State Hospital, “nationalist forces in Western Thrace (including the Church and local right-wing newspapers) initiated a campaign to cast her out due to her minority background.”\textsuperscript{35} Due to conservative, misogynist and anti-Muslim pressure, the government was obliged to select a Greek Orthodox man for the post. Since 2015, Mustafaoğlu has been working as the Vice Mayor of the city of Komotini.

Their reasons they give for having reservations about participating in politics include legal regulations, prejudices against women, and an overwhelming number of prejudices against their community. Lack of education and political experience were also cited by two respondents.

According to one respondent, minority women from Western Thrace are more involved in civil society organisations rather than politics: “our women are coming together and empowering themselves through associations in the fields of education, culture, solidarity and support.”\textsuperscript{4} However, only four women have participated in direct actions concerning their community in the past five years. Such a discrepancy between declared involvement in community affairs and actual

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[32] Kofinis, Stergios
\item[33] Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2017
\item[34] Tzafalias, 2014
\item[35] Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, 2010
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
participation in local actions is not easily accounted for. However, one possible explanation is that minority women in Western Thrace are supporting community affairs in less politically explicit ways.

Even on the grassroots level, minority women face obstacles in organising themselves. Since the Greek government still refuses to recognise the minority’s right to self-identification, it rejects all registration applications for local organisations that use the word “Turkish” in their name, including women’s organisations. For example, the Cultural Association of the Turkish Women of the Region of Xanthi was unable to register for this very reason.

Women in Western Thrace say that their voting behaviour is influenced by the challenges faces by their community, with injustices and inequalities ranking high on the agenda. Most respondents demand more representatives of the minority in parliament and invoke general concerns such as women’s rights, language rights, and minority rights.

Although actions aimed at increasing women’s representation were taken between 1991 and 1995 following a European Council recommendation, the number of women in Greek legislative and ministerial posts ranks among the lowest in the EU. There has been a slow increase in women MPs: six percent in 1996, nine percent in 2000, thirteen percent in 2004, sixteen percent in 2007, and nineteen percent in 2012, while on the executive side only one out of twenty-one members of the cabinet is a woman. Considering that no minority woman from Western Thrace has ever been elected MP or MEP, the consensus among women in Western Thrace is that they are insufficiently represented in the political sphere on the state and European level. With few women politicians on the local level, and no representatives on the national and European level, it is no surprise that women in Western Thrace feel overall alienated by politics.

Two respondents of this study explain that even though they are part of the EU, they do not enjoy the same rights and standards of living as other EU citizens. Foremost among the suggestions listed on how to reverse current trends are: better education for minority girls and women, eradicating violence against women, enabling women’s participation in public life and in the workforce, and providing institutional support for women’s political work. Two respondents note that such crucial issues are being discussed in minority politics but ignored at the national level.

From the Greek state, women in Western Thrace demand freedom to express their culture, language, and identity and freedom from prejudice as well as gender quotas. From their own community, they ask for men to change their attitude towards women, with one respondent adding that the Turkish-Muslim minority needs to adapt to a changing world and adopt a broader, more modern perspective regarding the place of women in society.

Two of the testimonies are particularly poignant and testify to the anguish of this community: “Thank you for including us in your survey, for not forgetting we exist,” writes a woman. Another one adds: “What makes us inferior to the European or Greek woman? I have asked myself this question for years, in despair. I leave you to look for an answer. I’m fifty-nine years old, [my life] has passed waiting for today to be better than tomorrow.”

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Politics, power and resistance: A Somali perspective

By Juweria Ali

As a young child around the ages of seven or eight, I watched the Libyan historical film called *Lion of the Desert* at least a dozen times. It is based on the story of Omar Mukhtar, the Bedouin resistance leader who led a fierce anti-colonial desert guerrilla war against Italian invaders from 1911 until 1931 when he was executed by Mussolini’s forces. I do not recall why I watched the film so many times, or indeed why each time I watched it, it felt like the very first time. What I did know was that in some strange way, I was intensely drawn to this film. Without any knowledge or understanding of the historical context, the brutalities of colonialism and its lasting legacies, I understood this: there are those who wield power in this world and that there is widespread injustice everywhere.

Throughout my years in school, I recall seeking the political within any subject whether that be in Geography or in English Literature, naturally gravitating towards any theme or subject matter that may have political connotations. Of course, I later learned that everything is inherently political. Though I cannot pinpoint a particular moment that invigorated my interest in politics, I do recall my trip to Mogadishu at the age of six shifting my perspective to a global one; a more complicated one that extended beyond the comfortable confines of my own reality in Copenhagen at the time.

I became involved with the Labour Party in Birmingham, UK, around the age of fifteen through volunteering, which I continued to do throughout my time in college. It was during university that I really began to forge my global awareness, political consciousness and identity. My involvement with the Black and Ethnic minority Association (BEMA) at university equipped me with the language to process the political forces and realities that shaped the world around us. Through this, I was also able to locate myself and identify my own positionality around the global conversations around conflict, racism, inequality, climate change, capitalism, poverty, sexism and xenophobia.

During my time at university both as an undergraduate and master’s student, I served as Co-Chair of BEMA, as well as a committee member. It was an important and necessary space for the revival of our critical consciousness through engaging with both national and international campaigns. Essentially, we equipped ourselves with the knowledge and understanding of the world we were going to enter once we graduated, and in many ways, I feel we did just that. As BEMA members, we challenged one another in many different respects and fostered a culture where we researched for ourselves what was left out of our formal curriculums. As a result, we left university having gained all that we could from our formal education, but also from our own search for knowledge.

I have always considered political participation and activism to mean far more than voting in local and general elections or signing a petition, though these are important and necessary. For some people such as myself, political participation is a necessity as my entire existence is political. Every day that I tread this earth (particularly Europe) as a visibly black and Muslim woman of colour is a political manifestation; an assertion of defiance and a risk where the politicised and securitised elements of my identity garner a multitude of reactions and hostilities.

It was my experience working at the European Parliament that really highlighted this. I was a European national, yet very visibly un-European and a Muslim woman of colour, who had the audacity to work at an international European institution. This was something that I was reminded of every single day through daily micro-aggressions. When you consider the reality that I worked in the same building as
‘Far-right’ groups in the Parliament every day, the image is even more chilling. I am fully aware that I embody a wholly politicised identity – a visibly Muslim, Black female – which certainly shapes my experiences and opportunities here in Europe.

Understanding ‘intersectionality’ both as a concept and as a theoretical tool has been an important means of making sense of any issue I am confronted with. The idea that the overlap of multiple identities contribute to a particular type of systemic oppression enables one to comprehend personalised marginalisation. It enabled me to understand that whilst experiencing Islamophobia, I also experience anti-blackness within the Muslim community. Within institutional racism, gendered racism for me manifests itself in the form of misogynoir. Thus, I fight multiple battles on multiple fronts.

For individuals such as myself, we navigate society wearing our identities on our sleeves, our lived experiences have continually been shaped by who we are and what we look like. It is no surprise that before a job interview for instance, our preparation necessarily involves worrying about the possibility of facing discrimination for being Black, female, Muslim and having a foreign sounding name. Having to work ten times as hard as your counterparts is a notion that we live by, and whether it was professors voicing their surprise that I were able to ‘grasp certain concepts’ or professor’s amazement with the score I received on an essay.

A teacher once asked me if I was certain that I could do a PhD research on the Ogaden-Somali region since my affiliation with it via my roots was not a good enough reason to choose this topic. It was as though it was not a worthy intellectual pursuit in its own right. It was also as though my interest in carrying out research on the region was purely emotional thereby reinforcing the highly subjective black female academic trope. Nevertheless, I went on to receive a fully funded PhD scholarship where I am researching the very themes that seven-year-old me began to grapple with on colonialism, power, hierarchies of domination and resistance focusing on the context of Ogaden resistance against the Ethiopian state.

I also work with a number of advocacy and human rights organisations. My advocacy work with the Ogaden Youth and Student Union (OYSU) and Ogaden Peoples Rights Organisation involves relating human rights and humanitarian matters, broadly speaking. In my capacity as the Advocacy Chair OYSU, I have presented at various conferences and parliamentary hearings at the European Parliament, including ‘Minority Women’s Rights: An Ethiopian Inferno?’ and ‘Exchange of Views on women and Gender Violence in Ethiopia’ organised by the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights. I spoke about the institutionalisation of sexual violence in the Ogaden region as a deliberate military strategy and the psychological traumas associated with such violations. I have also had the opportunity to present the plight of Somalis in Ogaden at the UN Human Rights Council, and take part in the UN Minority Forum, as well as numerous other side-events at the UN.

The advocacy work I am involved with is multi-dimensional, focusing on both humanitarian and political issues, region as well as the historical and political developments which speak to the crisis in the Horn of Africa today. We partner with various institutions and civil society organisations to put together community events, and monitor the human rights violations committed in the Ogaden region by the Liyu Police and the Ethiopian military. We also fundraise for those who have fled the region and are currently in the Dadaab refugee camp, as well as those impacted by droughts inside the region. Importantly, although we are a small organisation with very limited resources, we have also established several partnerships with key human rights groups to scrutinize a state such as Ethiopia to the extent that state representatives employ methods of silencing us at major international forums such as the UN.

Moreover, as Somali diaspora communities residing in the West, a key principle of ours is ensuring that we do not co-opt the voices of the people we are advocating on behalf of. We place them at the very centre of all our work. We understand that not everyone prescribes to the same political ideologies. As such, our main aim is to support and amplify the voices of the most marginalised members of the Somali community in Ethiopia, those who have been forgotten in prisons and forcefully displaced, those who lost their livelihoods and survived massacres and sexual violence.

Naturally, the work that I am involved with attracts backlash, and reprisals are a huge issue. To silence us, Ethiopian government officials threaten the family members of activists who reside inside the Ogaden region. The family members of many of my colleagues are imprisoned, while others operate secretly. Amidst all of this, my personal experience with political engagement is that there continues to be somewhat of a disdain towards girls and women who have the audacity to be vocal about an issue, particularly highly divisive issues. It is very common to be told to mind your business and not concern yourself with such complex issues in an even more complicated region.
However, the way I see it is that I do not need an invitation to do what is right, which in this case is to actively take part in the liberation of peoples in the Ogaden region and ensure they are able to live a life on their own terms. For me, this necessarily involves being vocal people both in my academic and personal capacity about the oppressive forces of power that continue to subjugate, and it involves standing with the oppressed wherever they may be. The easier thing to do would have been to disassociate myself from the on-going struggle, but I cannot be neutral. Neutrality is a luxury I cannot afford. My very survival and existence necessitates confronting the injustices of the destructive forces of power in the racist and capitalist patriarchy within which we exist.

Finally, I would like to end with Audre Lorde’s words, which epitomize my own search for language, liberation and understanding: “What are the words you do not yet have? (Or, for what do you not have words, yet?) What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?” They serve both as a reference point and as a reminder to be unapologetic and relentless against oppressive forces of power within academic work and beyond.

1 Lorde, 1984.
The political participation of migrant women in Germany

By Virginia Wangare Greiner

In 2016 I began my political journey as an elected representative of the African Community in the Foreigners Advisory Council for the City Frankfurt am Main in Germany, which meant that I gained a place in the Foreign Representative Parliament in Frankfurt for the next 5 years. My journey is indicative of the difficulty with political participation in Germany. So, what do I mean by political participation? How is this participation reflected in the German Parliament of 2018, and more importantly, what are the barriers that an African woman would face entering the various levels of the political machinery in Germany?

I would admit that although I worked with politicians at various levels, be it local, regional and national, the political machinery was never one in which I felt comfortable with and always felt out of my comfort zone. But suddenly I had to learn quickly about what was involved and who I was up against. As the CEO of a self-help organisation, Maisha e.V. African Women in Germany, I was up against party politics. How do I stand against candidates who have a much higher level of resources and support that affirms their candidacy? We had to be organised as a community to ensure that women were not left behind in the melee of elections. Our shortlist prioritised women on our list of nominations. In addition, we ensured that the various African communities in the city of Frankfurt were engaged in our work and took opportunities to address them whenever necessary. Even after consistently serving African communities for over twenty years in the city of Frankfurt, I suddenly realised how important it was to have party machinery behind you. Involvement in elections is expensive both in terms of time-commitment and finance. Meetings, leafletting, door-knocking, speaking at small meetings, follow-up visits with undecided voters, and even hiring a car to take people to vote on a very cold election day, which demotivated many Africans from going out. In the end, it seemed that last minute decision to hire a car and go out was a crucial factor in the voting. It seems that parties operate without the difficulties that independent candidates face.

For me another question loomed large: how do you penetrate what seems to be impenetrable, especially as there are no open incentives to join these structures? The fact that you can count the number of people involved in the Bundestag who have an African background on one hand simply shows that the exception proves the rule. It seems to me that no one is willing to embrace the migrant and introduce them to the political machinery. In reality, the politics of exclusion is at work. Migrant women's participation in politics is limited in several ways, but mostly because of the language barrier. The vast amounts of information on the German voting system makes it difficult for some migrant women to understand their voting rights. On the other hand, migrant women's political representation is limited by difficulties in raising sufficient funds and resources for political campaign, particularly for women who often lack established funding networks. The complex nature of voting, the paperwork involved, and the appreciation of all that my election campaign involved indicated to me my own lack of civic education and the fact that many people of my background are not made to feel that this is important in our society, my society as a Kenyan German.

There is an overwhelming feeling that I should leave big decisions of a political nature to others, who are more capable of making those decisions. I do not even have to be consulted. Instead, I just need to give my consent every few years at elections. This kind of thinking can be seen in the way migrants are to pay their taxes but are not encouraged to take up citizenship or be involved in politics. Long
ago, an American said, ‘No taxation without representation,’ which leads me to another question. Why is politics so male-dominated? This is even reflected at the Foreigners Parliament in Frankfurt. Perhaps, it all about power and the view that power is best kept in the hands of men, despite the Chancellor of Germany being a woman. Consider the fact that after the 2017 elections – the German Parliament was the largest it has ever been with 709 seats compared to 631 in 2013 – the percentage of elected women is the lowest it has been for over twenty years.2 There are now 219 women and 490 men in the Bundestag. It has been noted that fifty-eight people of migrant background entered the Parliament, but they constitute only eight percent of the Parliament, compared to the twenty-two percent of the population they represent.3

In 2016, my organisation organized a conference on the subject of ‘The Political Participation of Migrant Women in Politics’, in which we called for an inclusive and root-and-branch approach to politics. To make politics migrant-friendly, we should incorporate the mentoring of migrant women by political actors and parties. These training programs will facilitate voter education that encompasses the duties and opportunities in voting and being voted for. Any gender-segregated training programs should be facilitated by migrant women themselves. Men should also be willing to vacate the corridors of political power and to co-create equality-based democracy, where the intelligent voices of women can be heard and their qualities of decision-making garnered. I think that migrant women must be included in the constitutional development process. The constitution of Germany should consider the interests of migrant women socially, as well as politically, and include them in the integration process of decision-making. If these issues are not addressed, then as a migrant woman, the mysteries of party politics will remain impenetrable and the richness of the various groups of women in this society will be lost to the political process in Germany.

1 A phrase, generally attributed to James Otis (1761), that reflected the resentment of American colonists at being taxed by a British Parliament to which they elected no representatives. It became an anti-British slogan prior to the American Revolution: “Taxation without representation is tyranny.”
2 The election confirmed what had already been suspected. The percentage of women in parliament is the lowest it’s been in almost 30 years. There will be 219 female MPs in the new Bundestag – just under 31% – that is a more than 6% drop from the previous parliament.
3 DW, 2017
Let me tell you a story. It is the story of a little girl – a Scottish Gypsy Traveller child – born into a ‘racial experiment’ established at Bobbin Mill woods, Pitlochry, Scotland in 1947, her father and other male family members having fought against such fascism in World War II. She dreamt of a better life – it never materialised. All of the children in those experiments (drawn from the world of ‘Tinkerdom’, aka Gypsy Travellers) were compulsorily forced to attend school. I was that little girl, forced to attend school until eighteen years old whilst my mother had a dream that I would get an education; a better life than the one she experienced – full of prejudice, hate and revilement. Well, I attended that same school, suffered the relentless bullying, and was even first in my class and won several prizes each year. I continued to Aberdeen University, graduated with Hons. Celtic Studies/English with merits in both subjects, then a Post Graduate Certificate of Education(secondary) in Gaelic and English, a further Post-Qualification Diploma in T.V. Studies through the medium of Gaelic – all with merits – and completed the Council of Europe Human Rights Training Certificate.

Babe in the woods –
A Scottish Gypsy Traveller's perspective

by Roseanna McPhee

But how useful were those bits of paper? None at all. I am back living on the original experiment site, having been blacklisted in terms of employment, training and service provision for challenging the status quo pertaining to the Gypsy Traveller community and campaigning for better conditions on site (which can be viewed at YouTube under ‘The Forgotten Experiment’) – a one 1-bedroomed Nissan hut previously occupied by prisoners of war, boasting neither hot water nor electricity, for which we were charged rent and council tax.

After working as a Head of Gaelic Department and College Lecturer, I became unemployable. Until taking up carer duties, my main source of income was heavy manual work for a nursery. With the sale of the nursery, I have had no more outdoor work and have suffered sneering, because I was a woman seeking such employment. I was even turned away from a local raspberry farm in favour of migrant workers. I am still jobless, however, and facing an old age of poverty due to having no pension. My option, if I had the money to leave the country, would be to deny my ethnicity and blend in with the wider community – that has been a proven route for Gypsies to prosperity.

So, the list is: racial experiment survivor; victim of bullying, sufferer of inhumane and degraded conditions, blacklisted from employment, victimised as a political activist, denied basic services and charged for the privilege, denied secondary healthcare, and denied an adequate standard of living.

The ex-Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, Professor Alan Miller has acknowledged that “Gypsy and Travellers are disproportionately discriminated against”, echoed by BASW (2010), whilst another current Scottish Government advisor, Dr. Katie Boyle, wrote: “The evidence identified that protection mechanisms for socio-economic rights in Scotland are either insufficient or non-existent,” and that their research had further detected “a seismic gap in legal protection for economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights in Scotland.”

Therein lies the crux of my current predicament. Beginning with the Bobbin Mill racial experiment, there has been a historic breach of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ Article 11 on the right to an adequate standard of living (encompassing the right to a decent home, decent clothes and nutritious food), which has dogged me throughout my life. Despite my best efforts to gain an education and gainful employment, falling foul of governmental bodies has seen me blacklisted as an activist, which has led to political victimisation, breaching the International Covenant on Civil and
Political Rights’ Article 26 on the right to identify as part of an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority.

In turn, there have been pursuant breaches of ICESCR’s Article 6 – The Right to Work, with the knock-on effect of having to suffer inadequate living conditions, downright degrading treatment and derision as a woman seeking manual employment; thus reaching Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women’s articles 2c on establishing legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men, 2d on refraining from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women, 2e on taking all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women, and article 3, which states that states shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women. All these violations are intertwined with the right to an adequate standard of living and infringing the right to healthcare. For example, secondary referrals to specialists were refused by my doctor. All the above has been underpinned by breaches of the right to an effective remedy and the right to a fair trial.

Thus, the cumulative effect of the various forms of the ongoing discrimination and lack of access to effective remedy, eventually intersect with a deleterious effect on my health and well-being. I suffer from Myalgic Encephalomyelitis or chronic fatigue syndrome and several serious autoimmune conditions, all exacerbated by stress and combined with social marginalisation and reduced capacity to participate in civic events. This has been the effect of the attempts by the machinery of state to annihilate my culture. But if I may be allowed a final fanfare, please play the Elton John song, “I’m still standing, yeah, yeah, yeah, I’m still standing, yeah, yeah, yeah…”
Adopted and forced identities: An Ahwazi Arab woman's perspective

By Mona Silavi

I will start by repeating Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw: if we cannot see the problem, we cannot solve it. Crenshaw is a popular black feminist legal scholar who is very important to me because she coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to explain how a person can experience overlapping forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, or health as an individual or as a group. I am a woman from the Ahwazi Arab community in Iran, and in my work, I actively deal with racial and national discrimination of our community, but I also often witness discrimination against women, which is obscured by more prominent topics in our movement.

Ahwazi Arabs are an ethnic, national and linguistic minority in Iran that are sadly caught between intersecting and interrelated forms of oppression, excluded and marginalised based on their nationality and subjected to racism due to a historical Persian-Arab animosity. Iran, like other states in the region, is engaged in a 20th century “nation-building” project to create a monolithic ‘Iranian nation’ by suppressing ethnic diversity and imposing a Persian identity on non-Persian nationalities. These ethnic and religious groups comprise at least 50 percent – or two-thirds according to some estimates – of the population. Yet, these groups have not been accorded equal citizenship – their ethnicity and/or their religion have never been officially acknowledged. The Islamic Republic of Iran uses Shia theology, Persian literature, history, language, and education to deliberately privilege one ethnic group over others, thus creating socioeconomic inequality, exclusion, and oppression, thereby stifling any chance for democratic transformation. Promoting aggressive nationalism in Iran has chiefly manifested itself in anti-Arab racism. Other manifestations can be observed in their treatment of Iranian Turks, Kurds, and Balochs, as well as Sunnis and non-Muslims, such as Baha’is and other religious minorities.

Stories and poems are means through which every generation is educated. Each generation transfers their knowledge and culture to the next. Ahwazi women are being directly targeted by policies of the central government, because they are perceived as being in charge of transferring national identity and culture to their children. In the process of Persianization, Arab women also suffer from overt stereotyping in Iranian media. They are often portrayed as helpless, uneducated and dark-skinned (racist attitudes of Iranian media toward people of colour have never been addressed in Iranian society), unclean, or ‘unfeminine’. The stereotype also depicts Arab women as ‘bad wives’ based on misogynistic ideas that define and reduce women to objects with the sole objective to serve men’s satisfaction. In Iranian movies, Ahwazi Arab women are depicted as victims of tribal traditions, while the media fails to address the structural discrimination that contributes to the community’s lack of development.

Due to widespread discrimination against Ahwazi Arabs in general, men try to erase their background through marriage. Ahwazi Arab men are encouraged to marry Persian women as a way of changing or ‘improving’ their social class with better jobs and benefits, while Arab women are denigrated and dehumanised. This belittling of Ahwazi Arab women negatively impacts their self-esteem and indirectly persuades some women to imitate Persian women by denying their Arab identity. As a consequence, they also became less active in their own community. Although attitudes are slowly shifting in that Arab women’s and men’s self-confidence and political consciousness are improving, the women’s movement and their engagement in civil society has been delayed by this process of Persianization.
The intersectional discrimination that Ahwazi Arab women suffer from within their community, in addition to what they suffer from as members of a minority, is an important factor to consider. A long list can be made of forms of discrimination that women in Iran endure, from finding jobs to state-enforced dress codes. However, the experiences of middle class women from the dominant ethnic group are different to experiences of minority women. They had the privilege of studying in their mother tongue and had access to higher education, while women who come from minority ethnic groups have been marginalised and relegated to lower social standing for decades due to policies of the central government. Ahwazi women have fewer chances of learning Persian and continuing their education due to lack of schools in their region. If there are schools in nearby cities, it is more likely that families will send their sons to school instead. Their economic situation is dire; most rural women once worked in agriculture, rearing animals or cultivating farms, however, with the destruction of the environment, they are increasingly working as street vendors. An Ahwazi Arab woman is not only discriminated because she is a woman, or comes from a minority, or has lower socio-economic status, but carries the burden of being a poor minority rural woman all at once.

As far as Ahwazi Arab refugee women in Europe are concerned – and I am one of them – economic difficulties have a negative impact on our ability to participate actively in the civil society of the host country. We need some time to provide for and support ourselves. In addition, the absence of an independent women’s organization dedicated to minority issues that incorporates their activities on both women’s rights and minority rights into an organized framework further impedes our integration. Any attempt to reflect the linguistic or national rights of minority women inside Persian-centric women organizations is or would be confronted with aggressive nationalism, and minority women would be accused of secessionism.

This forces minority women to work within mainstream organizations, for example Iranian women’s organizations that are less concerned with minority issues. This situation pushes minority women activists to emphasize national and ethnic discrimination within Iran to the detriment of women’s rights. Hence, many minority women activists fear that their ethnic and national identity would be subject to prejudice for speaking out about themes that are commonly associated with ‘backwardness’ by the dominant nation (Persian) and state-centric oriented activists. On the other hand, minority women activists also fear the dominant patriarchal ‘backwardness’ by the dominant nation (Persian) and state-centric oriented activists.

In Iran I am unrepresented as a member of my ethnic and national minority group, and in Europe as an Iranian refugee. I am not represented by any organization that works on Iranian affairs, because firstly, these NGOs are mostly run by people from the hegemonic national, religious and linguistic group with state-centric attitudes and exclusive on mainstream issues with little regard for minority rights. This may not be necessarily on purpose: most staff members have never visited minority regions or are simply not sensitive to minority issues. A second reason is the ignorance of funding agencies and EU institutions about the reality in Iran. They fail to demand Iranian organizations to report on minority discriminations or they tend to stay away from controversial issues like minority rights in the Middle East. As long as the issue of minority rights in Iran is not considered as a problem, it will not receive enough attention. The Iranian government, the Iranian opposition, NGOs working outside Iran, and the EU are all responsible for this negligence.

In addition, within ethnic and national minority movements activities on gender (in) equality in the minority society are or would be considered unnecessary efforts that divert attention from the main national struggle and should instead wait to be resolved in the future. This is also a personal challenge. While working in politics as an activist, I am always being told by my male colleagues to postpone my concern on women’s rights and prioritize minority rights. I am told to respect the ‘Ahwazi Arab culture’ and avoid ‘provoking’ my community. The main challenge for me, and women like me, is changing ideas about how women should behave and who they should be, especially since the model of a ‘good Ahwazi woman’ is seen as married with children that she has raised as ‘heroes’ who will fight for the rights of the nation. This role is, of course, only reserved for men, never women, nor is it expected from them. This is the usual criticism that I receive from people. They stress the fact that it is better for me to be a ‘good woman’ and raise ‘good children’, while leaving politics to men. Moreover, I am often reminded that modernization is closely related to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to language and education. Since Ahwazi Arabs do not have access to books, text books and other educational material in their own language, modernization to
function like stereotypes, but they can also be extremely isolating. Minorities are stereotyped as groups that want to divide the country, who ask too much, and want to be privileged. They are even seen as nationalist sometimes. This is how people like us, from a minority background, always feel so alone. We feel we are doomed to live between walls, which systems and people intentionally or unintentionally created around us. We are in exile in our own homeland, while the bigger world condemned us to live in internal exile. In Europe, when I want to introduce myself, I face difficulties, because I am constantly being asked where I come from, both in official papers or by the people I meet. Where I am from is the second question people ask me after I tell them my name but answering never gets easier.
The migration, collective organising and activism of migrant women in Europe

By Irene Gómez Santos

The arrival in a strange land, without knowing what destiny has in store, is a hard experience that many people go through in their life time. Although there are different reasons that make people migrate, the most common one is the economic one. We move to places where opportunities and well-being are possible, or at least, they are believed to be possible, because humans by nature tend to aspire to improve their lives. In these times of globalized crises, and in the face of little to no prospects, migration to and mobility around Europe continues. As we yearn for well-being, work, and a dignified life, it is our duty to stop and reflect on the reality of what this means.

In 2013, when the whole world was subsumed in a global economic crisis, the European Parliament (EP) took into consideration the role that immigration would or could play in Europe. In March the EP highlighted in its resolution that “since 2012 the European population of working age is decreasing and, without immigration, in the next ten years it will be reduced by 14 million people,” while emphasizing that migration – both legal and illegal – needs a common legal framework in order to protect migrants.

At the end of the last century, and at the beginning of the 21st century, human mobility has risen, especially from the so-called countries of the periphery. This flow of people who want to enter, circulate, work, settle and live in the Europe Union has revealed once again a truth that had been previously articulated by Max Frisch: “We were looking for labour, and people came to us.”

These desires for integration in destination societies are approached by diverse theories that focus on the right of flee, the right to belong, and the right to migrate, among which is a very interesting proposal by Fornet-Betancourt although he does not state it explicitly: the right to migrate based on the idea that all human rights are equal, and have an equal right to citizenship, making it possible to imagine truly inclusive citizenships, which do not distinguish between citizens and foreigners, nor undermine rights based on said condition.

The right to education, healthcare, decent housing and work, pensions, a life free of violence, among many others, are what migrant women activists in Europe struggle for every day. They are active, on the move, and evolving as activists. Studies show that migration has the face of a woman. It is the women, mostly women who are mothers of families, who undertake their migratory project. When they arrive alone in Europe they have to face many obstacles like language learning, finding accommodation, and integrating into the host society. Although culture could be a barrier to social integration, we must not forget politics. Implementing laws and regulations that fully guarantee equal opportunities for migrant women is vital. At the same time, creating support networks where women can help each other in different areas of life is also a big part of overcoming obstacles to integration. Women come together, group, associate, and create bonds so they can progress in a strange land. Women create associations.

The origin of AMUINCA, the Association of Immigrant Women in Castellón, which I am part of was a group of friends and work colleagues who, at the end of the workday, discussed their issues and realized that their problems, difficulties, disappointments, as well as their joys, hopes and dreams were similar. At AMUINCA we grouped together under the motto “today for you, tomorrow for me”. It is the
first association of immigrant women of different nationalities in the province of Castellón, in the Valencian Community, with around 80 members, including Latin American, African women, both from the Maghreb as well as Sub-Saharan Africa, and Eastern Europe.

From this movement of collective organising, activism is forged for migrant rights in general, and migrant women in particular. We all know the moment in which our activism starts, but it never ends. An activist is made from the moment she sees injustices and inequalities, and remains an activist all her life.
Swiss vs "Usländer": To be or not to be

By Migmar Dhakyel

When I was in high school I was already involved in Swiss politics. I joined the Socialist Youth Party and in 2010 I became a candidate at the local elections in my hometown Wädenswil in Zurich. Following the resignation of a member of parliament, I replaced him when I was only eighteen years old.

I was obviously incredibly nervous and excited for my first parliament session. I was not only the youngest MP, but also the only person who was not considered ‘Swiss’ according to the mainstream definition. Once during a session break, I was asked by two MPs if I could speak Swiss-German and one of them reacted defensively when I answered "of course!" in Swiss-German, while the other continued to talk to me in a slow High German accent, which is often used by the Swiss when they consider you a "foreigner" or “usländer”. This is when I realized I was not considered Swiss because of my external appearance.

Working as an MP was not an empowering experience for me. As a young woman with immigrant parents, I felt that I was not good enough within the Social Democratic Party and the local parliament. It was difficult for me to build relationships, because I constantly doubted my skills and knowledge. I was incredibly relieved when I could finally resign from parliament and move to Geneva for my studies. Many years later I realised that what I had experienced was not personal but political. What I experienced were social structures built on stereotypes, which dictate who can and cannot participate fully in our society.

In the run-up to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, historic uprisings erupted in Tibet. International media covered the protests, as well as the shootings and mass imprisonment of thousands of Tibetans by the Chinese government. It was then that I joined the protests and gatherings of the Tibetan Youth Association in Europe, which is based in Switzerland and advocates for Tibetan independence.

The Tibetan Youth Association in Europe provides a social and political platform where young Tibetans can meet, and together with other young Swiss-Tibetans we created an atmosphere where everyone felt at home. We understood each other, and no one ever questioned our ‘Tibetan-ness’ and ‘Swiss-ness’. As a matter of fact, it was not about who you are but what you can do.

Unlike other Swiss youth organizations, there were no social or identity obstacles to our membership. By organizing protests, youth conferences, actions camps and social gatherings we could effectively develop our talents without judgment. The Tibetan Youth Association helped me to become an activist, to make mistakes and grow in a safe space that gave me self-confidence. It allowed many of us young Swiss-Tibetans to become political agents with our own voice.

Switzerland is regarded globally as a society with direct democracy, social and economic stability, but often people ignore the fact that Switzerland has one of the most restrictive naturalization processes in Europe, which allow ‘proper Swiss’ citizens to deny equal rights to ‘foreigners’.

The naturalization process is an institutionalized hassle. I still remember my mother’s nervousness when we met with the naturalization committee for our interview, which would determine our citizenship. The committee approved of our family’s request and suggested to the local parliament to give us citizenship. A few weeks later we had to attend the public session of the local parliament during which all ‘foreigners’ were asked to stand up, and then, the members of parliament voted...
in favour or against our naturalization. Luckily no one had something against my family. I remember one elder lady who didn’t raise her hand. Later I would learn that she was a member of the right-wing party and out of protest she has never raised her hand for any person.

Naturalization has become even more difficult recently, because the popular right-wing party, the Swiss People’s Party, is pushing for laws to ‘regulate’ the naturalization process using propaganda-like slogans, such as “fighting against mass naturalization.”

Not long ago, the naturalization request of one of my relatives was refused because allegedly her German skills were not strong enough and her child’s grades were too low. This is how the process of becoming a Swiss citizen is completely politicized. It scrutinizes individuals with arbitrary decision-making that makes the naturalization process in Switzerland unjust and fundamentally irreconcilable with democratic principles.

Until recently I never considered myself Swiss even though Swiss-German is my mother tongue and the only home I have ever known is Switzerland. Since primary school my ‘foreigner’ classmates and I were called “usländer”. We understood from a very young age that there was no chance we will ever be considered full and equal citizens of this country.

Through my studies and my activism, I began to understand how political concepts like citizenship are shaped as exclusive to deny the under-privileged their social, political and economic rights. Today I re-claim my citizenship in Switzerland, and this sense of citizenship should be guaranteed to each person whose life and home revolves around Switzerland.

A few years ago, I read an interview with Kijan Espanghizi, an activist and historian, during which he said: “Switzerland also belongs to us!” This sentence resonated with me strongly, and it felt as if someone finally put into words what I have always felt but have never been able to articulate.

A few months later I joined Institut Neue Schweiz (“Institute New Switzerland”), a pioneering think-tank that aims to transform Switzerland and its perception of migration through academia, activism and art. Almost everyone involved has an immigrant or refugee background. As soon as we came together, it felt as if we’ve known each other for years. We enabled each other to articulate our visions for Switzerland, and I quickly realized: we are not few, we are many.

Before Institute New Switzerland, there was no platform where we could speak or represent our interests. This is a fact. I think this is because of the prevalent narrative that everyone who was lucky enough to land in Switzerland – a politically stable and rich country with a strong welfare system and good working conditions – should be thankful and happy, instead of voicing their criticism. This is the message that many of us got from mainstream Swiss society and politics.

My two best friends and I were separated at the age of twelve when we were put in different classes according to our grades. I saw our class being separated. Unsurprisingly, most kids of immigrant parents are put in lower classes. Today only 1 of 5 high school students have a non-academic background2.

I was lucky enough to have a mother who despite her being a working immigrant single parent had the strength to guarantee her children would get equal opportunities. She paid the tuition for courses that guaranteed my entrance into high school, which in most cantons of Switzerland is an exam that only twenty-five percent of pupils pass. At home she created an atmosphere that taught us that we could be whatever we wanted to be.

But the obstacles for many are still too high. Immigrants need to work twice as hard to give their children equal opportunities. These obstacles need to diminish. If Switzerland truly believes that it is a society where the strength of its people is measured by the welfare of its weakest members, as proclaimed in the preamble of our Constitution, then the current status quo is not an option.

You can live in Switzerland for many decades and still be considered a ‘foreigner’. You can even be born in Switzerland and still be considered a ‘foreigner’. If I ever have a child I am most certain it will be considered a ‘foreigner’. That’s why we must approach such terms critically. When will be accepted as full and equal members of this society? How many more so-called “integration” programs do we need?

My grandparents fled from Tibet to India when China invaded their home country. My parents immigrated to Switzerland to be more than refugees and thus, build a better future for themselves and their families. I have always been interested in politics, and that is partly because my parents came to Switzerland as Tibetan refugees in the late 1980s. Concepts like ‘human rights’ and ‘freedom’ have been

2 In most cantons of Switzerland, one must pass a highly competitive exam to enter high school. High school guarantees access to university education.
familiar to me since I was a child, as they have been for other children of Swiss-Tibetans. We grew up protesting in favour of Tibetan independence our parents made sure we would not forget where we came from.

I don’t think there is a proper political space for immigrants, especially immigrant women, nor their families and children in Switzerland. These stories are invisible. That’s why I am lucky and proud to say that through organizing and working with like-minded people we can represent ourselves. I will continue to voice my views on freedom, justice and equal rights for the un-represented and the invisible. That’s the least I, and we, can do.

Switzerland needs a new national identity. Switzerland needs a more inclusive diverse society. Switzerland needs change.
Conclusion

By Iva Petković

More than sixty years since the Treaty of Rome, which enshrined gender equality as a fundamental right in all areas of life, there remains a persistent under-representation of women in politics across Europe. EU Member States have also committed themselves to promoting the equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels and in all fields with the 2011-2020 European Pact for Gender Equality and the 2015 Council conclusions on “Equality between women and men in the field of decision-making”, as well as in international political frameworks such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, the under-representation of women from ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, migrant and stateless minority groups in elected and appointed political positions remains a critical issue, although the situation varies considerably across EU Member States, and even across national minority groups analysed in our case studies.

Our research demonstrates that despite their marginalisation out of political power and decision-making, minority and migrant women have political agency and impact. Although progress has not been uniform or uncontested, they have collectively organised to demand their rights, change cultural attitudes, reform laws and policies, build women’s policy institutes, and provide vital social services when formal institutions have failed to do so. Many minority and migrant women who participated in this study have argued that for them political participation is a necessity and a question of survival, since their nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, and background often expose them to specific injustices and hostilities.

The aim of this study was to identify the reasons why this stubborn deficit in women’s representation is proving so difficult to overcome, as well as the factors that positively impact gender balance and minority and migrant women’s political participation and representation. We found that the under-representation of minority and migrant women in political power and decision-making is a broad and multifaceted issue. By including broader historical overviews of social and policy developments for each case study, we determined that contributing factors to gender (im)balances in politics are social, cultural, economic, political and institutional. Our case studies revealed that these factors need to be contextualized and analysed from an intersectional perspective – an approach that considers power relationships in relation to the dominant community, as well as within minority and migrant communities.

1. Key challenges and opportunities

- Politics remains a male-dominated domain where the ‘sticky floor’ and ‘glass ceiling’ are still firmly in place as invisible barriers that keep women from leaving the bottom of the wage distribution and advancing in their careers. Due to traditional gender roles, women in politics often endure gender-based discrimination, sexist stereotyping, as well as a culture of machismo. Gendered perceptions of leadership, reinforced by mass and social media, means that women’s capabilities are often questioned, doubted, or met with backlash. Minority and migrant women in politics must also navigate direct and indirect discrimination, including from other women. Lack of role models also cultivates a false perception that politics is not for women and can lead to lower levels of confidence among women. While some minority women look up to Leanne Wood in Wales or Sakine Cansiz in Northern Kurdistan, many reported not having an aspirational figure in their community.

- Unequal pay and employment opportunities are challenges facing most women, however, minority and migrant women are vastly under-represented in part-time, low paid, and insecure work like agricultural or domestic work.
This precarity is compounded during economic downturns, as is the case for minority, migrant and Roma women in the Greek context. **Time and working commitments** continue to exclude women from the equal sharing of social, family and caring responsibilities. **Lack of childcare provisions** and work-life balance policies is particularly damaging in the broader context of neoliberal capitalism and austerity, since the responsibility of reproductive and care work is shouldered almost exclusively by women. Although the Basque Country is at the forefront of public policy on gender equality, Basque women lament that many women abandon their political activities to care for their family, while men rarely make that choice.

- **Lack of devolution of political power** makes political systems less inclusive and responsive to the needs of national, ethnic, religious and stateless minorities, including women from those groups. As this study shows, locally implemented gender equality programs are more likely to be dynamic and prepared to meet the needs of local women’s needs, especially women in rural and remote areas. In this way, devolved Basque and Welsh parliaments regularly allocate funds and pass policies that are favorable to a diverse set of women in their region, including successfully promoting gender parity within political bodies.

- **Democratic political institutions often fail to reform** their structures, procedures and leadership positions in a way that would make them more egalitarian, participatory, and accountable, which is why many Basque women proposed radically transforming society. A positive example from this study includes HDP and BDP political parties in Turkey, since they put in place co-presidency and co-mayorship positions, both within their parties and municipalities. **Crackdowns on political opposition groups and civil society organizations** creates a dangerous atmosphere where activists are afraid to speak out for fear of reprisals, and minority and migrant women’s demands are seen as having little or no merit. As this study shows, gender equality cannot thrive where political pluralism is not guaranteed and promoted, as is the case in Western Thrace where minority women’s organizations are banned and in Northern Kurdistan where minority women’s organizations have been shut down and their leaders imprisoned. **Clientelism** is another challenge, since it marginalizes women’s groups that refuse to ally themselves with political parties or politicians.

- **The structures and procedures of political parties** can support or hinder minority and migrant women’s participation in politics, because of how they recruit, train, appoint and promote candidates that run for office. As our case studies show, specialized trainings and mentoring programs that meet everyone’s needs; autonomous branches for women, minorities, youth and the LGBTQ+; voluntary gender quotas and measures that prevent women candidates from being placed on the bottom of the party list; can all have positive results, especially in devolved parliaments when it comes to the representation of women from national minorities. However, women candidates tend to have **less access to campaign funding** from political parties, which further marginalizes minority and migrant women from poorer backgrounds and impacts their chances of success. Instead, HDP halves the application fee for women applying to be election candidates. **Internal party culture** also impacts the sense of inclusion of minority and migrant women, the possibilities available to them in getting involved in activities and campaigns, and the channels available to report cases of sexual harassment.

- **Electoral systems** affect women’s representation, as these can impact how interests are distributed within elected bodies. Single-member plurality and majority systems tend to impede women’s chances of winning seats, because the electorate votes for an individual, and voters are more likely to support a mainstream male candidate. On the other hand, proportional representation systems are generally more favorable to women, because candidates are chosen according to their placement on a varied party list. Constitutional and legislative **gender quotas** regulate the share of women on party lists or the number of women elected by establishing a required minimum or maximum number or percentage, however, most gender quotas approach women as a unified group defined by a single axis of oppression. Women from politically under-represented groups, such as minorities, migrant communities, youths, people with disabilities, the working class etc. remain marginalized.

- **Gender-mainstreaming measures** are not sufficiently implemented in a wide range of sectors. Gender balance in politics also depends on the adoption of concrete and practical gender-sensitive policies in other fields like education, social affairs, agriculture, urban planning, transportation, media or finance. Ministries, equality bodies, observatories and women’s institutes can be vital players in promoting, advising, planning and overseeing the implementation of equality policies and their outcomes for women. However, they **rarely integrate an intersectional approach**, consult women’s organizations that represent the most disadvantaged members of society or collect segregated data based on more than one or two grounds at sub-national levels. The **abolition of women’s affairs ministries** in France and Turkey are worrying signs that issues pertaining to gender equality – from femicides to reproductive rights to unequal
representation – are not being taken seriously by governments. By incorporating their work into family affairs ministries, governments are fortifying the traditional link between women and the domestic sphere. A positive example can be found in the Basque Country, as Emakunde advances gender equality by establishing gender equality units, developing action plans, collecting data, carrying out impact assessments, advising public authorities, and supporting and consulting women’s civil society groups.

- **Legal discrimination** against minority women still exists in places like Greece, where the recognition of Islamic law in cases of family, divorce and inheritance disputes leave many women in Western Thrace legally unprotected and at an intersectional disadvantage. In terms of equality and parity laws, the **gap between legislation and its implementation** reflects the low levels of enforcement, lack of effective sanctions, and deep-rooted social norms and beliefs. Equality laws also tend to leave little space for the recognition of multi-dimensional equality as a legal principle. Legal systems that rely on **generalized concepts of equality in law**, fail to recognize groups with special interests or needs. The case of women in Brittany shows how France’s abstract and indivisible understanding of ‘citizen’ or ‘woman’ constitutes a conservative approach to anti-discrimination measures and does not protect the most disadvantaged.

- Discrimination against national, racial, ethnic, religious, migrant and stateless groups is compounded by **rising far-right movements and political parties** that have an ideology based on misogynistic, racist, nativist and islamophobic values and ideas, such as Golden Dawn in Greece or UKIP in the UK/Wales. Their ultra-conservative, exclusionary and Eurosceptic campaigns seriously threaten minority and migrant women’s rights, by, for example, ensuring the loss of funding for social charities that support disadvantaged women in the case of Brexit. They also painfully resurrect the recent memory Franco’s and Greece’s military dictatorships where cultural oppression, gender hierarchies, and crackdowns on civil rights were brutally enforced.

**2. Evidence of multiple and intersectional discrimination in politics and beyond**

The first category of discrimination occurs when an individual suffers discrimination on different grounds on separate occasions. Some gender-based discrimination and disadvantage that minority and migrant women experience are shared with majority women, although in some cases such disadvantages are intensified for the most vulnerable women. All women in our study, except Breton women, confirm feeling discouraged from pursuing political actions or positions because they witness women being sexualized, infantilized, and objectified. Welsh, Basque and Kurdish women in particular were concerned about widespread sexual harassment, gender-based violence, unequal pay, gendered stereotypes, and unequal division of responsibilities within families. As one respondent exclaimed, “The lack of equality is tantamount to lack of democracy.” In their testimonies, minority women explained that they feel they have to work harder than men in the same positions.

However, Breton women who participated in our study cited prejudices against the Breton community more often than discrimination against women. One participant even stated that she feels uncomfortable identifying herself as a woman and prefers to identify as Breton only. Such a position underlines the challenges in identity-based classifications by sex or gender and demonstrates the instability of the category of ‘women’.

Women in our study also frequently refer to experiencing **cumulative or multiple discrimination**, which is when a person is discriminated against on the same occasion but in two different ways. Minority and migrant women blame a combination of language discrimination, lack of education, political inexperience, and gender-based discrimination for inhibiting their political participation. While the risks and costs of running in elections are generally higher for women than men, many minority and migrant women face additional constraints in terms of time-commitment and financing due to their social location. Meetings, leafletting, door-knocking, speaking at meetings and events, follow-up visits with undecided voters, and even hiring a car to take people to the ballot box are all costly impediments, which are exacerbated by the complex legal and administrative nature of campaigning. All this discourages minority and migrant women, especially the most vulnerable, from running in elections, which inevitably also hurts their representation in political bodies where decisions are being made.

Minority and migrant women also report suffering **intersectional discrimination** specific to their social location, in a way that is not shared by majority women. Intersectional discrimination is qualitatively different from the addition of two or more sources of discrimination. Due to intersectional discrimination, or the interaction of social, cultural, economic and political factors, disadvantaged minority and migrant women tend to have higher levels of unemployment and inactivity,
Minority women in politics are over-represented in precarious and low-wage jobs, and face difficulties accessing financial, social, health, and transportation services, all of which are further exacerbated by language barriers, lack of information, poor socio-economic conditions, and multidimensional prejudice and stigma.

In their testimonies Kurdish women and women from Western Thrace addressed the ways in which they experience intersectional discrimination, which is not shared by majority women or men from their communities. For example, a big threat to Kurdish women's rights arguably comes from the Turkish state, which retains both an extremely conservative stance on women's role in society and a heavy-handed approach to Kurdish affairs, and as a result it has imprisoned Kurdish women's activists and politicians, closed women's associations, and used gender-based violence to sow fear among the Kurdish community. The case of Taybet İnan, is one harrowing example. In addition to this, child marriages, bride exchanges, and forced marriages to elderly people, also persist within Kurdish communities. Unsurprisingly, Kurdish women rank violence against women as the most important issue facing them.

Women from Western Thrace testify to having unequal power relations within their communities and unequal power relations in relation to the dominant community. Since the Greek government still refuses to recognize the minority's right to self-identification, it has rejected women's organizations from officially registering if they use the word ‘Turkish’ in their name. Besides a worrying lack of role models for young girls, patriarchal, conservative, islamophobic and anti-minority structures like mainstream media and political parties actively reinforce women's inequalities by pushing women from Western Thrace out of public life through public ridicule and denigration. Moreover, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne continues to be interpreted by the Greek state to imply the necessary acceptance and recognition of Islamic law in cases of family disputes, meaning that three state-appointed muftis act as religious arbiters of Islamic law in case of marriage, divorce and inheritance disputes. Men's unconditional right to divorce and their right to larger inheritances are just some of the ways in which this legal interpretation leaves women from Western Thrace vulnerable to intersectional discrimination.

Furthermore, minority and migrant women are often compelled to divide their energies and juggle multiple 'delicate loyalties' within a variety of social movements and civil society organisations, which are often organised around single issues or identities. “I actively deal with racial and national discrimination of our community, but I also often witness discrimination against women, which is obscured by more prominent topics in our movement,” points out Mona Silavi. The struggle between two – sometimes seemingly contradictory – activisms was also shared by other participants in our study.

3. Recommendations

Inclusion

Both formal political institutions and informal groups should adopt ambitious objectives for equal representation and decide on concrete steps to be taken to achieve this goal. They should also realize a people-centered approach that accounts for individual needs and multiple intersecting identities. Leaders, staff, members, and volunteers should be educated about intersectionality and trained in translating it into practice, including working with women, youth and LGBTIQI people with specific needs. Instead of imposing a “one size fits all” approach in laws, policies, programs and events, all activities should be mindful of the needs of minority and migrant women, as well as young women, women with disabilities, single mothers, economically disadvantaged women, and trans, non-binary and intersex people.

Accessibility

Information on laws, policies, programs and services should be easy to access on different platforms, formats and languages, especially those relevant for minority communities, asylum seekers and refuges, because they should be communicated in a way that is understandable to everyone. Accessibility needs – physical, psychosocial, intellectual and learning (dis)abilities – need to be met with holistic assessments of safety, accessibility and inclusion, taking into account the specific needs of women. Accessibility and inclusion should be guaranteed in all services, amenities, facilities, and information platforms. Access should also be ensured for those with lower educational or socioeconomic background. Inclusive approaches also require a respect for privacy and confidentiality at every step of the inclusion process.
Research

Gathering empirical evidence concerning the situation of minority and migrant women’s access to political decision-making is a mandatory first step. Local, regional, national and European institutions and political parties should monitor who is standing for elections and publish diversity data about candidates. All programs should be informed by research that was designed and executed with gender and intersectional perspectives and methodologies, which are inclusive of socio-economic factors, ethnicity and race, refugee/citizenship status, age, (dis)abilities, and other factors. Considering the lack of data on minority and migrant women’s political engagement and the difficulty of assessing the levels of participation and/or marginalization across Europe, improved data collection and increased funding for research would be beneficial.

Political education

To improve the political representation of minority and migrant women, more effective and better quality political and civic education is needed. Authorities at all levels should facilitate voter education, while political parties, which serve as gatekeepers to public office, should also implement training programs for women candidates and prospective candidates. These skills-based training programs could include, for example, workshops on electoral law, public speaking, fundraising, local governance, human resources, media relations, and social media management. Any gender-segregated training programs should benefit minority and migrant women, and they should be designed and facilitated by minority and migrant women themselves.

Gender-sensitive institutions

Public institutions should adopt action plans for promoting gender equality through a dual approach that combines both specific targeted actions and gender mainstreaming, including in all phases of the budget cycle. Authorities at all levels should establish clear roles, responsibilities, and lines of accountability of key governmental and oversight bodies. These measures should include information and awareness raising campaigns, media strategies and regular monitoring and evaluation of gender impacts and considerations. Local, regional, national and state institutions should consider building the capacity of their staff to provide them with the necessary tools and skills to increase their overall efficiency in gender mainstreaming in programmes. Public institutions should engage with non-governmental stakeholders with a view to ensuring an inclusive and comprehensive coverage of gender equality issues.

Intersectionality in EU law

Women experience gender-based discrimination, because of how power relations are forged through gender, but these experiences differ for different women in material ways since race, ethnicity and class also intimately shape the nature of power relations. Although discrimination law focuses on the role of ‘grounds,’ intersectionality can find expression in EU law by interpreting the list of grounds expansively. So far, the European Court of Justice has stated is not within its power to multiply and reconfigure subjects within law, and the European Parliament has proposed amendments to EU rules to include multiple discrimination, however, combining grounds is more appropriate in cases of additive multiple discrimination than intersectional claims. Instead, intersectional experiences should be absorbed into anti-discrimination law by acknowledging that even within a single ground, multiple intersecting power relations can be addressed. The category ‘woman’ should cover all women, but the more disadvantaged and vulnerable she is due to other grounds, the more protection she should be entitled to. Similarly, all members of a racial, ethnic, national, linguistic or religious minority should be protected, but women who suffer from specific discrimination as minority women (and possible other grounds), should be further protected and their claims should be further enhanced rather than dismissed.

Involvement in public policy

Intersectionality has yet to be operationalized in public policy. Since policy is not experienced in the same way by all populations, public institutions and political organizations should consult minority and migrant women to benefit from their experience and expertise. The efforts and ongoing work of women in civil society organizations should be better recognized, so that women and girls with direct experience of the issues in question can be empowered to drive the policy agenda. To lead more effective and responsive policies, minority and migrant women

1 European Commission, 2016.
should be represented in the formulation of all policy initiatives, especially those that directly concern them, so that sources of inequality can be identified, policy solutions can be properly contextualized, sufficient resources enabled, and possible consequences anticipated.

Support within political parties

In addition to gender quotas, political parties can support women’s political participation by establishing women’s branches and networks that would put pressure on party leadership to adopt their recommendations into official party platforms. Additionally, political parties should commit to a policy of parity in all its activities and functions. Considering the rise in campaign costs, political parties should adopt measures to financially assist and incentivize women candidates – especially minority, migrant and other marginalized women candidates – during campaigns. Political parties can build fundraising networks or reimburse child-care costs and travel expenses where relevant. Political parties can also offer women who are socioeconomically marginalized membership and registration fee waivers to increase their participation in the political process. Moreover, political parties can create special funds for training and consultations that are designed and facilitated by minority and migrant women themselves.

Support for the grassroots

Creating support networks where women can help each other in different areas of life is also a big part of overcoming obstacles to political integration, participation and representation. National, regional and local governments, policy institutes, political parties and foundations should provide a space for minority and migrant women to exchange ideas, network with each other, and push discussions forward, while also supporting them as they conduct research or put minority and migrant women’s issues on the political agenda.

Funding

State, regional and local governments need to provide increased, long-term and sustainable funding for women’s organizations – including minority and migrant women’s organizations – which are currently still worryingly underfunded. They work

with inadequate human and financial resources to provide minority and migrant women with necessary legal and psycho-social services and educational programs, or to advocate for their rights and push for legal and policy reforms. Funding should also be guaranteed for organizations that work with women with overlapping identities and intersecting needs, not only larger mainstream nonprofits.

Diversity in media

Media outlets need to adopt measures to ensure diversity in hiring and promotion, and efforts need to be made to counter stigmatizing and homogenizing portrayals of minority and migrant women. By reporting on the latest developments in a sensationalist way, media outlets reinforce stereotypes. Positive and nuanced stories of minority and migrant women are needed to counter the essentialist views of women from national, ethnic, racial, religious and linguistic minority groups. Mainstream and minority media outlets also need to commit to factual accuracy and apply rigorous fact-checking. Editorial guidelines should require journalists to be open-minded and thoughtful, strive to avoid bias, reject pejorative terms, and be ready to admit and correct mistakes, especially since gender equality discourses are often co-opted to pursue an anti-immigration agenda.

Engage men for change

Views on politics, work, community and family life are slowly changing. Awareness-raising for men about the importance of gender parity in political institutions and decision-making (among other issues) should be targeted. Spaces should be created for men to interrogate the role of power and examine their privileges and entitlements, and they should be encouraged to foster egalitarian values and practices within professional and formal settings, as well as private and informal settings. Men should be willing to vacate the corridors of political power, at least to the extent that allows the intelligent voices of women to be heard and their qualities of decision-making garnered equally to that of men.
Abbreviations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>Justice and Development Party of Turkey (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)</td>
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<td>AM</td>
<td>Assembly Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMUINCA</td>
<td>Association of Immigrant Women in Castellón</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAC</td>
<td>Basque Autonomous Community</td>
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<td>BDP</td>
<td>Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi)</td>
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<td>BEMA</td>
<td>Black and Ethnic minority Association</td>
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<td>CCN</td>
<td>Chartered Community of Navarre</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>DÖKH</td>
<td>Free Democratic Women’s Movement (Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi’nin)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>European Free Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>European Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETA</td>
<td>Basque Homeland and Liberty (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDP</td>
<td>Peoples’ Democratic Party in Turkey (Halkların Demokratik Partisi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>KJA</td>
<td>Congress of Free Women (Kongreya Jinen Azad)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQI</td>
<td>Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
<td>Member of European Parliament</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td>Kurdistan Worker's Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCB</td>
<td>Regional Council of Brittany</td>
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<td>UKIP</td>
<td>UK Independence Party</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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A message from Coppieters Foundation

Coppieters Foundation is a research centre focusing on European affairs since 2007. Thanks to the support of European institutions and its own network, Coppieters Foundation develops new ideas and produces knowledge on the management of cultural and linguistic diversity, collective rights, multilevel governance, decentralization, state and constitutional reform, statehood processes, self-determination, migration, conflict resolution, peace studies and the protection of human rights in Europe.

Coppieters Foundation is affiliated to the European Free Alliance political party, and is recognized as a European Political Foundation by the European Parliament. Up to now, every book and policy paper published by Coppieters Foundation has contributed new reflections and visions for a diverse, fair and sustainable Europe. This is why I am particularly proud of this publication, because it represents a new and important contribution to European public policy debates. I am certain that it will have a significant impact on European lawmakers, policymakers, academic and researchers.

I would like to thank and acknowledge the authors, editors and coordinators of this study for their excellent contribution to Coppieters Foundation. I also thank you, the reader, for your interest in the work of our foundation.

Günther Dauwen
Secretary of Coppieters Foundation

www.ideasforeurope.eu

The aims of the Coppieters Foundation

• To develop new ideas and produce knowledge on the management of cultural and linguistic diversity, collective rights, multilevel governance, decentralization, state and constitutional reform, statehood processes, self-determination, migration, conflict resolution, peace studies, and the protection of human rights in Europe;

• To raise awareness on issues of special interest for the foundation and its members;

• To influence decision-making process at the European level and create a legal framework that allows for an enhanced implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, the right to self-determination, better protection of diversity and minority rights, and a stronger respect for human rights in Europe;

• To drive the EU towards an alternative institutional structure that is more democratic, more respectful of collective rights and more aware of complex (multi-national and multi-cultural) realities of EU Member States;

• To play a role as a platform for dialogue between academia, European institutions (the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions) and other political actors;

• To transform scientific knowledge in the fields of political science, economy, sociology, philosophy and history into usable concepts for political action;

• To feed the European Free Alliance with politically relevant concepts, ideas, data, and knowledge, both in the institutional sphere and in EFA’s action sphere outside European institutions.

Coppieters Foundation takes all necessary actions to promote and achieve the above stated goals by observing the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

The geographical scope of the Coppieters Foundation is the European Union together with EU candidate and potential candidate countries. The partners of the organisation are based in 8 member states of the EU and active in 14 regions or stateless nations.
Maurits Coppieters
(Sint-Niklaas, 1920 – Deinze, 2005)

The Fleming Maurits Coppieters studied history and later became a Doctor of Laws and obtained a Master’s degree in East European studies. During the Second World War, he refused to work for the German occupier. After many years as a teacher, he worked as a lawyer for a while. He was one of the people who re-established the Vlaamse Volksbeweging (Flemish People’s Movement), of which he was the President from 1957-1963.

Coppieters’ political career began when he became a member of the Flemish nationalist party Volksunie (VU), which was formed in 1954. With the exception of two years, Coppieters was a town councillor between 1964 and 1983. He was also elected as a member of the Belgian Chamber (1965-1971) and Senate (1971-1979). At the same time, Coppieters became President of the newly formed ‘Cultuurraad voor de Nederlandstalige Cultuurgemeenschap’ (Cultural Council for the Dutch-speaking Community), from which the Flemish Parliament emerged, when the VU formed part of the government. In 1979, Coppieters was elected during the first direct elections for the European Parliament.

As a regionalist, he became a member of the Group for Technical Coordination and Defence of Independent Groupings and Members in the European Parliament (TCDI). Among other things, he made a name for himself when he championed the cause of the Corsicans. In the meantime, Coppieters also played a pioneering role in the formation of the European Free Alliance, of which he became the Honorary President and continued to play a role in its expansion, even after he said farewell to active politics in 1981. In 1996, Coppieters joined forces with the President of the Flemish Parliament, Norbert De Batselier, to promote ‘Het Sienjaal’, a project with a view to achieve political revival beyond the party boundaries. Coppieters died on November 11, 2005.

Among other things, Coppieters was the author of ‘Het jaar van de Klaproos’, ‘Ik was een Europees Parlementsled’, ‘De Schone en het Beest’. He was an honorary member of the EFA.

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- Fundació Nexe País Valencià (Valencian Country), fundacionexe.org
- Home of Macedonian Culture Stefanou Drogaoumi 11, PO Box 51, 53100 Florina Macedonia, Greece
- Le Peuple Breton, Rue Pinot Duclus 9, 22000 Saint-Brieuc Breizh (Brittany), peuplebreton.net
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- Kurdisch Institute of Brussels, Belgium, kurdischinstitute.be
- CIEMEN – Catalunya (Catalonia), ciemen.cat Catalonia
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- Free State of Rijeka Association Rijeka, Rijeka
Coppieters Foundation promotes policy research at the European and international level, focusing primarily on management of cultural and linguistic diversity, multi-level governance, political and economic governance of sub-central governments, decentralization, state and constitutional reform, self-determination, conflict resolution, human rights and peace promotion. Coppieters Foundation is a European Political Foundation, founded and recognized by the European Parliament since 2007.

The Unrepresented Nations and People Organization (UNPO) is an international, non-violent and democratic membership organisation. Its Members are indigenous peoples, minorities, unrecognised States and occupied territories that have joined together to defend their political, social and cultural rights, to preserve their environments and to promote their right to self-determination.