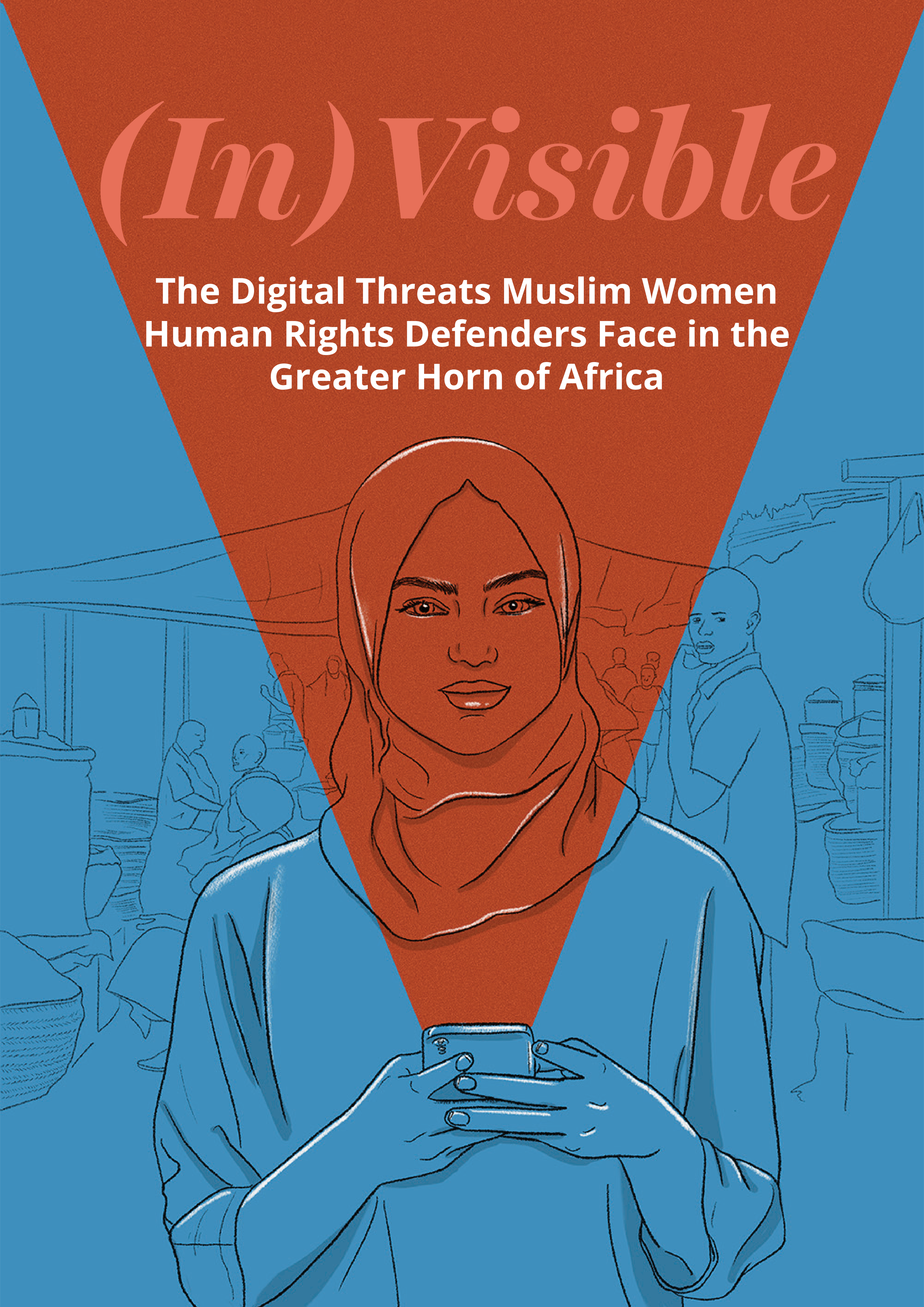
(In)Visible

The Digital Threats Muslim Women Human Rights Defenders Face in the Greater Horn of Africa



POLLICY

musawah

For Equality in the Muslim Family

Authors
Mardiya Siba Yahaya, and Neema Iyer. May, 2022.

Report Design: Wilson Lukwago

Illustrations: Neema Iyer

Suggested Citation
Mardiya, S., Y., and Iyer, N. (2022) (In)Visible: The Digital Threats Muslim Women Human Rights Defenders Face in the Greater Horn of Africa.

Contents

03 *Acronyms*

04 *Executive Summary*
Introduction

05 *Key Findings*
Understanding the Scope of Threats
Personal Strategies Used by MWHRDs
Conclusion & Recommendations

07 *Background*
Visibility: Assurance or Threat?
Why this Research?
Research Objectives

10 *Literature Review*
Overview of The Digital Media Landscape in the GHoA
Freedom of Speech in East and the Horn of Africa
Internet Disruptions in the GHoA

13 *Contextual Analysis of the Experiences of MWHRDs Working on Religion and Islamic Laws in the GHoA*
Understanding the Types of Threats Muslim Women Human Right Defenders (MWHRDs) Face
The Work of MWHRDs and the Specific Threats They Face
Locational Context to the Threats Faced by WHRDs: The Intersections of Family Law, Religion, Cultural and Political Contexts
MWHRDs in Muslim Majority Countries
MWRHDs In Muslim Minority Countries
Organising Using Online Spaces
Online Violence and Threats
Gaps in Literature and the Need for Islamic Feminisms and Transnational Solidarity
Actions and Policies to Protect WHRDs and their Gaps

21 *Methodological Approach*
Limitations

22 *Findings*
Scope of Work for Muslim Women Human Right Defenders (MWHRDs)
The Use and Limitations of Digital Media
Mapped Threats
Threats as a Result of Online Visibility
Main Actors Who Threaten MWHRDs and Modes of Attack
Understanding the Threats MWHRDs Face
Topical, Locational and Political Threats

28 *Challenges and Concerns of MWHRDs*
Key Challenges and Concerns of MWHRDs In the GHoA
Feminist Advocacy, a Betrayal of Islam, and Good Muslims
Presence as Absence: A Power Analysis of Stakeholders
How Aggressors Enact Violence
Digital Inequalities

36 *Subversion: Strategies and Tools WHRDs Utilise to Protect Themselves Online.*
Using the Block Feature
Community Support Networks
Existing Policy Frameworks to Protect WHRDs Online

41 *Recommendations*
Needs of MWHRDs in the GHoA
Personal Digital Security Tools and Strategies
Securely Sharing Information Online
Anonymous Online Navigation
Secure Telephone Communication and Instant Messaging
Teaching Digital Security at the Grassroots Level
Advocacy Opportunities and Best Practices for Achieving Holistic Digital Security in the GHoA Region
Regional Legislature and Accountability Bodies
Separate the State and Religion
Opportunities

53 *Conclusion*

54 *References*

Acronyms	*Definitions*
GHoA:	Greater Horn of Africa.
HRDs:	Human Rights Defenders.
WHRDs:	Women Human Rights Defenders.
MWHRDS:	Muslim Women Human Rights Defenders.
OTT:	Over-The-Top.
ISP:	Internet Service Providers.
Telecos:	Telecommunications.
LGBTQI:	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer Intersex.
SRHR:	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights.
OGBV:	Online Gender Based Violence.
DM:	Direct Messages.
GPS:	Global Positioning System.
IP:	Internet Protocol.
VPN:	Virtual Private Networks.
TOR:	Onion Routing project an open-source privacy network that enables anonymous web browsing.
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
ECOWAS:	Economic Community of West African States.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Safety online lies at the contours of digital rights, and all people should be able to engage on social media and use digital technologies without any threats to their freedoms, privacy, access and lives in general. However, Muslim Women Human Right Defenders (MWHRDs) continue to experience grave forms of violence and threats due to their activism. As such '(In)Visible' was conducted to identify and understand the needs, challenges and opportunities for bolstering the digital safety of MWHRDs in order to recommend long-term actionable strategies for Muslim organizations working on family law reforms, movements and activists in the GHoA region.
The report sought to document the landscape of risks from stakeholders and promote the use of sustainable risk-mitigation measures and mobilise the relevant pushback against patriarchal structures and hegemonies.

Key Findings

Understanding the Scope of Threats

"We are threatened when we speak on gender and religion. The issue is mostly when we attempt to advocate for women's right in Islam"

While MWHRDs who participated in this project mainly work on family laws, they also work on justice for gendered and sexual violence survivors, teach digital skills to other WHRDs and communities, and engage in peace building and advocacy. MWHRDs inherently challenge patriarchal systems within their countries and communities, thus face threats of violence online from religious leaders, the state authorities and mostly men within their communities. Some of the threats they experience in their daily lives include sexual violence, trolling and misinformation, financial violence, threats of murder, verbal abuse and harassment, to name a few. Their cultural, political and locational contexts also come into play in the type of experiences they face and digital security concerns that exist.

The concerns of MWHRDs include challenges to secure funding for advocacy in their region, the complexities of navigating the intersection of gender, religion and the state and online security and digital inequalities. Each concern poses challenges to their work by limiting advocacy on gender-related issues, due to the fear of harassment, intimidation and existing moral shaming that comes with MWHRDs engaging in feminist work. Similarly, the lack of funding also affects how much security they can access, and effectively online advocacy which requires skills and capacity development. MWHRDs are also unable to promote or publicise their work thus limiting visibility which is integral to human rights advocacy.

"Normally we have communication challenges especially when there is no data. Another challenge we face is when communities expect us to pay them to participate in our work because this the norm politicians have created"

Finally, digital inequalities pose accessibility threats specifically regarding their access to digital spaces, and ensuring online safety given that they struggle with basic digital engagement skills. Collectively demonstrating the scope of risks and threats that MWHRDs face with the GHoA.

Personal Strategies Used by MWHRDs

The key strategies MWHRDs use to ensure personal safety online includes;

01 **Community:** Relying on their communities for support during periods of intense harassment, threats and violence.

02 **Self-Censorship:** Other MWHRDs stay away from social media altogether or censor themselves. They highlighted that visibility poses a significant risk, as such limiting it is a protective strategy.

03 **Digital Security Training:** Some organisations who work with MWHRDs also provide security training, and ensure that they protect the identities of their employees.

04 **Encrypted Messaging:** Organisations also highlighted the importance of encrypted messaging platforms, as such refraining from Whatsapp. Another important tool some MWHRDs use is their ability to identify ways to engage with different audiences on different platforms.

05 **Block, Mute, Report:** In addition, many of them who use social media shared that their go-to protective feature is to block, report and mute online abusers, and trolls.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In addition to the personal strategies that MWRHDs, we came up with a few more recommendations for them to follow to protect themselves online.

- Using secure messaging platforms such as signal is important to avoid any information or data breaches.

- Second, TOR and AnonymX also help in concealing users' digital identities, and may be helpful to engage with other MWHRDs without being targeted by state intelligence agencies.

- On a more holistic level, digital security and safety should be designed with the grassroot communities in mind. It should be replaced in context, embodiment and location, and should not only focus on the technical.

- Finally, "we need practical policies on communication and online/digital protection and rights and strong implementation bodies."

Thus, the report maps out how different African countries and political organisations can improve their digital governance laws and policies protecting WHRDs in general.

Background

Visibility: Assurance or Threat?

Women Human Right Defenders (WHRDs[1]) work to protect the rights and dignity of all people. In the Greater Horn of Africa (GHoA) region, their work mostly entails working on Muslim family law reform, gender equality and challenging authoritarian regimes. Family law sits at the core of religious systems, norms and practice. Hence to advocate for reforms within this domain, WHRDs have to engage in the added labour of re-interpreting patriarchal explanations of religious texts. The work they do undermines and questions the foundations of patriarchal hegemonies, which also include the state's role within the system. Consequently, they may face heightened risk and severity of violence as a result of their work.

Part of the lived reality of WHRDs is facing grave forms of violence and threats due to their activism. As such, the possibilities afforded by digital technologies allow many WHRDs to use social media as sites for resistance, advocacy, information sharing and community organising. Social media serves as a space for many WHRDs to share and amplify voices that were censored out of mainstream media narratives. They also find a 'rare form of freedom' online, to express themselves within cyberspace (Au and Liu, 2021). Online platforms have also rapidly become a source of accountability and documentation of the evidence of both the work of WHRDs and the hostility and violence against them by many aggressors.

However, as digital platforms became sites for WHRDs, especially from younger generations, to organise and form transnational networks and solidarity, governments and authorities began to crack down on the freedoms afforded on these online spaces. Examples of such crackdowns include censorship and limitations of communication by blocking certain media sites (e.g., Facebook during and since the elections in Uganda in January 2021 (Otto, 2021) and in Tanzania across 2020 and 2021 (Korombo, 2020), shutting down the internet in times of political unrest (e.g., Ethiopia and Sudan) (Woollacott, 2021), and tracking activists' and protestors' activities through Internet Service Providers (ISPs) (e.g., Sudan) (Skok, 2021).

---

[1] WHRDs are used to denote Women Human Rights Defenders in general, while MWHRDs are used when referring specifically to Muslim women.

Such actions by government authorities have been possible given that communication, data protection and technology laws and policies across Africa remain either non-existent or incomprehensive. In the cases where policies or frameworks do exist, the implementation of these laws is mostly ineffective.

In addition to regressive and repressive action by governments, hate speech, mis/dis-information and harassment have proliferated in online spaces. The sanctuary once provided by digital platforms rapidly evolved into a space that blurred the lines between online and offline/physical violence for WHRDs. Digital platforms provided the tools and techniques to aggressors, religious and state authorities to monitor, track, and enact and amplify violence on WHRDs. Hence, visibility becomes as risky as the benefits of it.

Why this research?

Given the threats that online spaces can pose to WHRDs, it is particularly important for WHRDs to be appropriately trained with digital safety and security skills. This includes conducting risk assessments, staying abreast of current threats, keeping devices and software up to date, and maintaining other measures against hacking, doxxing, harassment, surveillance, and tracking.
Digital security for WHRDs also means addressing some of the inherent inequalities that exist in digital technologies, including accessibility, self-censorship, and online violence. Prior research has shown that large numbers of women and WHRDs do not know where to seek knowledge on digital security, are not aware of laws that exist to protect them and face large gaps in digital skills (Iyer et al, 2021)

This research report seeks to understand the needs, challenges and opportunities for bolstering the digital safety of WHRDs in order to recommend long-term actionable strategies for Muslim organizations, movements and activists in the GHoA region. The report includes three main sections: mapping of online threats faced by Muslim Women Human Right Defenders (MWHRDs); understanding the practices and safety strategies of MWHRDs within online spaces; and lastly, exploring actionable recommendations towards achieving a safe digital space for WHRDs in the GHoA.

Research Objectives

The research objectives for this study are as follows:

01 To document the landscape of risks/threats from stakeholders, challenges, needs, and capacities around holistic digital security facing WHRDs who work at the nexus of religion/Islam, women's rights, and law reform;

02 To propose actionable long-term steps and strategies towards addressing and mitigating the insecurity advocates face within the digital landscape; and

03 To promote the use of sustainable risk-mitigation measures among national partners and mobilise appropriate and relevant pushback against patriarchal forces at national, regional, and global levels.

Literature Review

Overview of The Digital Media Landscape in the GHoA

In 2011, the Horn of Africa was one of the least digitally connected regions in the world (Gagliardone and Stremlau, 2011). Despite the increase in digital connectivity and use in the region over the past decade, online presence, access and use remains relatively low. The gaps in Internet connectivity and digital media usage represent the socio-political and cultural realities in the GHoA. In a report titled Digital Media, Conflict and Diasporas in the Horn of Africa, Gagliardone and Stremlau (2011) explain that "the development of the internet, mobile phones and other new communication technologies have been shaped by conflict and power struggles in these countries." It was also shaped by the diverse cultural and political contexts of the region. Mapping the digital media ecosystem in the GHoA as part of the above- mentioned report explained that low Internet penetration in Ethiopia, for instance, was a post-war strategy adopted by the government seeking to consolidate political power and minimise the risk of adversarial voices disrupting its political and ideological agenda. The government's monopolies on telecommunications (Telecos), also worked for centralising control of data and Internet accessibility. As such, the government was able to regulate the Internet during conflicts and protests. More recently, accessibility obstacles include underdeveloped communication infrastructures; such infrastructures are almost universally missing in rural areas where many MWHRDs in the country work (Freedom House, 2018).

Similarly in countries such as Uganda (Boxell and Steinert-Threlkeld, 2021) and Tanzania, there is high censorship of certain social media sites and Internet blockages usually during elections. Meanwhile, financial barriers are weaponised by state actors to limit accessibility and usage of social media in general and for advocacy. For instance, Uganda's introduction of the Over-The-Top (OTT) tax on the use of social media services in 2018 affected the access and usage of digital spaces. While this specific tax was removed, Uganda then reintroduced a twelve percent tax on Internet data which continues to impact accessibility (Mwesigwa, 2021). Consequently, these financial barriers have gendered ripple effects where "structural (paid and unpaid labour), institutional (family and organisations), and cultural (gendered norms and values) conditions combine towards the gendered digital disadvantage" (Research ICT Africa, 2021).

Meanwhile the government and political insurgents in Somalia used digital technologies to promote religious and political propaganda. The country's long history of religious and political wars and conflicts complicates ideas of freedom of expression that comes with internet access and usage of social media. Citizens are unable to trust or distinguish between media freedom and security, especially when MWHRDs continue to face threats of killing, murder and abuse (ibid).

Together, MWHRDs are restrained by gendered, institutionalised and cultural structures and hegemonies that control women's financial freedoms that allow them to safely and effectively engage in their work. They also experience financial violence due to state actions that limit their access to paid work. Advocacy and feminist work also relies mostly on external funding which has been found to be limited, especially for WHRDs working in the Global South working on issues such as religion (AWID,2021).

Freedom of Speech in East and the Horn of Africa

Internet freedom has become synonymous with freedom of expression and speech. The lack of free expression in countries in East Africa and the Horn of Africa transcends into how they come to experience online spaces, further sealing the importance of political and cultural structures in enabling the safe use of digital media as a site for advocacy.

In 2011, East African states, particularly Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Tanzania and Rwanda, developed the free expression law and policy that was to protect citizens' freedom of expression. The notable principle in the law stated that "access to information is a fundamental right." During its formulation, WHRDs campaigned for change by engaging regional and international stakeholders, and publicised violations of expression and information rights in their countries (Article 19, 2012). "Sudan's 2019 constitution also granted citizens the right to privacy (Article 55) and free expression (Article 57) and 'the right to access the internet' (Article 57(2)) (Hamad,2021). With these laws, many WHRDs could anticipate a future with fewer threats, harms and intimidation and some form of protection when these rights are violated. However, the restrictive legislature that governs people's expression continues to thrive within the East and the Horn of Africa, with little effort towards repealing it. WHRDs and activists continue to face persecution and harm for their work. Meanwhile, perpetrators of violence against WHRDs are hardly apprehended. At the same time, governments continue to focus their attention on Internet infrastructure, rather than a balanced approach which includes legal protection frameworks (Article 19, 2012).

The restrictive nature of Internet freedom persists. For example, in 2021, Ethiopia passed a Proclamation on Hate Speech and Disinformation (Access Now, 2020), which critics have claimed falls short of the international and regional freedom of speech standard. The proclamation also increases state and private institutional policing and surveillance. A similar law, the Computer Misuse Act, the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019) and/or other Penal Laws of Uganda, was also passed to prosecute people spreading misinformation. Still, the law was also found short of international standards for freedom of speech and expression (Article 19, 2020).

Despite the existing laws, policies and proclamations that are supposedly towards addressing cybercrimes and ensuring digital safety, states often use them as validations to "stifle freedom of expression and target journalists, human rights defenders, bloggers and peaceful protesters" (ibid). As such freedom of speech and internet freedoms in the region remain volatile, regardless of existing legislation towards 'cybersafety.'

Internet Disruptions in the GHoA

Internet disruptions have become the most common tactic by repressive governments to limit the flow of information and online organising. Different GHoA states apply diverse forms of disruption, with the most extreme being total blackout of Internet services.

Sudan's 36-day internet blackout in 2019 was the country's longest to date (Hamad, 2021). The shutdown was the totalitarian government's response to nationwide protests against the former President, Omar Al-Bashir, that was also organised through social media by activists and WHRDs. The most recent shutdown which was inspired by activists' protests against a military coup and government in October 2021 lasted for 25 days. In 2020, South Sudan also used the same approach to silence activists who called for a protest against the government (Reuters, 2021). Additionally, Somalia experienced an Internet blackout during a parliamentary vote of no confidence against the Prime Minister (Netblocks,2020), Hassan Ali Khaire. Similar situations also occurred in Uganda during its 2016 and 2021 elections (APC, 2021). Tanzania also used the same tactic during its 2020 election (Deutsche Welle, 2020). Twitter remains blocked until today. Finally, Ethiopia also continues to adopt internet shutdown approaches as a response to political unrests and conflict (Taye, 2020). Internet shutdowns happened in 2020 during protests demanding justice for the activist Haacaaluu Hundeessaa and in 2021 in Tigray amidst the ongoing conflict (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2021) .

Internet blackouts throughout the GHoA are actions towards limiting the use of the online space for organising protests and building transnational solidarity that would bring light to the realities of minority groups within these nations. Constrained access to communication channels also limits the work of WHRDs, where they are unable to communicate with each other and share information that might be beneficial to their security. Cutting access to information and communication not only violates the right to freedom of information, but also serves as a power tactic against WHRDs that removes them from their safe communities and networks leaving them vulnerable to the 'unknown'. What's more, lack of access to communities isolates WHRDs, making it easier for state and non-state actors to enact various forms of violence against them. Consequently, when people's source of information and communication is cut, time passed has a long-term effect in the ways in which information is disseminated. Real-time information sharing provides uncensored insights into the realities of people. For example, many people outside of Sudan are unable to comprehensively recount the events of 2019. The shutdowns continue to hide the violence WHRDs have faced in the region, especially during political unrest (Skok, 2021). In contrast, the live documentation of #EndSARS in Nigeria in 2020 played a significant role in holding the government accountable for the killing of protestors. WHRDs in the GHoA remain intimidated due to the various threats they face, hence affecting how much information they actively share and ways they use social media for advocacy in general.

Contextual Analysis of the Experiences of MWHRDs Working on Religion and Islamic Laws in the GHoA

Understanding the Types of Threats Muslim Women Human Right Defenders (MWHRDs) Face

MWHRDs within GHoA face a number of threats based on oppression along several different dimensions such as gender, religion, region, class, race, sexuality and so on. MWHRDs have reported intimidation, their homes work places being raided, being physically assaulted, increased threats of sexual violence, stalking and tracking, and the shutdown of their communication and information systems (ISHR, 2021). Such threats can stem from different aggressors such as individuals or small groups, organisations or government authorities.

The common threats and violence they face includes death, sexual violence, harassment, unlawful arrests and verbal abuse (CIVICUS, 2011). In one example, in 2013, a Somali journalist who aimed to bring attention to the rape of a young girl was jailed along with the victim "on the basis of fabricating false stories" (Siha, 2021). Similar incidents of unlawful arrests have since been reported by WHRDs across the African continent. Another example of such violent threats can be demonstrated by the bombing of a women's right organization's office in Somalia by religious insurgents to intimidate the staff and to discourage them from challenging religious patriarchal norms and systems that affect women (CIVICUS, 2011).

Other recent incidents include the attacks WHRDs in Sudan faced following the military coup in 2021. The Internet shutdown in Sudan signifies a violation of freedom of access to the internet, and a way to limit the work of WHRDs who utilise the online space to organise and resist dominant power structures and hegemonies.

In an instance of institutional intimidation, the head of a Ugandan NGO shared that male colleagues in the space ridicule the work of NGOs focused on women's rights. Other feminist and women's rights organizations and groups on the continent have also shared that they have been subject to verbal abuse for challenging "men's morality" (ibid). The following sections provide more details on the specific threats faced by MWHRDs.

The Work of MWHRDs and the Specific Threats They Face

MWHRDs challenge patriarchal hegemonies including religious and political structures, hence resisting various forms of power. A 2011 CIVICUS report on challenges faced by women in Africa's civil society shows men in authority often rationalise violence and threats against WHRDs because they believe the women defenders seek to 'eliminate' men. Additionally, WHRDs who attempt to challenge religious texts, authoritarian regimes and cultural norms tend to face similar, yet distinctive threats.

For instance, when women challenge religious texts, they may be accused of apostasy (the abandonment of a religious belief or principle), and within Muslim religious states can be subject to jail time and other forms of violence (CIVICUS, 2011). Re-reading religious texts to advocate for more progressive family laws, for example, is considered as an act that challenges God's decree. Furthermore, WHRDs who assist rape and gender-based violence survivors may be arrested or

threatened with violence, as demonstrated in the 2013 case of the Somali journalist.
Women who organise or focus on LGBTQI rights, challenging anti-homosexuality bills and state administered homophobia, seek to resist religious, cultural, and state violence. However, in 2011, many women's organisations critical of LGBTQI rights in Uganda discontinued advocacy in this dimension due to the government's threats to close civil rights organisations who promoted LGBTQI rights. This is in addition to the threats of sexual violence and arrests that advocates face.

Locational Context to the Threats Faced by WHRDs: The Intersections of Family Law, Religion, Cultural and Political Contexts

In Islamic states (countries that use Islamic law as a ruling jurisdiction), WHRDs face both state-facilitated legal action, prosecution and control, and community-based risks and threats. In this case, both parties use religion as the validation for prosecution. Meanwhile, although WHRDs in non-Islamic states face state prosecution, religion may rarely be referenced as the direct cause for such actions. On the other hand, WHRDs in non-Muslim majority countries still face risks, and threats of violence at the community level, where religion is often used as means govern social spaces.

MWHRDs in Muslim Majority Countries

The political and cultural contexts of MWHRDs impact the threats they face. The work of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA), which is based in Sudan, includes challenging authoritarian regimes (Siha, 2020). In Sudan, the network has documented the work of WHRDs during the recent coup and the murder of WHRDs during peaceful protests. WHRDs in Sudan face threats for advocating for peace and gender equality. They continue to face internet shutdowns and other forms of censorship, which impedes their freedom of communication in the region.
Similarly, SIHA and partners also released a solidarity statement addressing the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia, and the need to protect WHRDs in both regions (FP Editors, 2021). The statements highlight threats such as abduction, raiding of homes and hospitals and sexual violence against defenders during war and conflict (Siha, 2021).

In 2019, Almaas Elman, a Somali-Canadian activist, was shot and killed on her way to the airport in Mogadishu. The driver who was present explained that it was a targeted attack (Dahir, 2019). Almaas belonged to a family of activists, and their work on gender, peace and security in Somalia is notable. Thus, the killing of Almaas was seen as part of the many attacks on activists and WHRDs in the region.

Within Islamic majority states and communities, to challenge guardianship laws (Shaikh, 2009) is to challenge both community and state (in the case that the state is an Islamic one). Altogether, this shows how the work of WHRDs tends to be intersectional and the threats they face can also be multi-layered, i.e., gendered, religious and political.

Oppression exists at the locus of the systems of domination; and states, according to Olufemi (2020), organise our lives through laws, welfare, and policing. As such, to advocate for progressive family laws means to resist and diagnose the sexist state, the religious state and patriarchal systems, cultures, and hegemonies.

In Islamic religious texts, the guardianship law (wilayah) is the legal representation of the child, which entails financial authority and the personal affairs of the child. Hadana on the other hand, is child custody law: who has custody of the child depending on the age of the child. Moller (2015) shares that child custody law has received significant reforms, yet the guardianship law continues to be very strict. These laws, within Islamic states, for example, are enforced and implemented at the state level.

A brief by Musawah shows that both laws remain gendered, and mothers often lose custody to their children when they divorce or remarry. Most of these laws undermine agency and infantilise women, and according to Musawah's brief, automatic award of custody or guardianship based on the gender of the parent does not address the specific needs of a child (Musawah). Other work of WHRDs on family law include ending polygamy, unequal inheritance, promoting equal divorce rights and partnerships as equals.

Islamic feminists, including some WHRDs, have long attempted to move for more progressive family laws challenging most of the above stated categories. The reforms MWHRDs seek also require the rereading of both jurisprudence texts and religious texts, hence inciting polarities and the idea that 'religion and feminism' are incompatible. For example, to end polygamy requires explaining the limitation that religious texts place on the polygamous marriage institution. Religious texts have often been subjected to patriarchal and masculinist definitions and interpretations (Seedat,2021), hence, many religious authorities and states, threaten MWHRDs and feminists who attempt to move for reforms of oppressive laws with prosecution of apostasy, claiming religion should not be subject to 'modern reinterpretations.'

MWRHDs In Muslim Minority Countries

Meanwhile in countries such as Uganda, South Sudan or Tanzania that are not Islamic states, control through threats and threats of violence are enacted at the community level. This means that a WHRD working within the cultural, political and locational context of Uganda would not necessarily be directly involved with the state, but may be undermined and unprotected given that the state may not be concerned with Islamic jurisprudence. Contrary to a state such as Uganda, in Somalia or Sudan, the state ensures the implementation of the laws. As such WHRDs who work within this domain, directly experience the three-fold threat and oppression as women, Muslim and within politically restrictive states. Additionally, in Uganda women activists organise against repressive government systems, patriarchal communities, and laws. This shows that even within 'democracies' WHRDs still challenge sexist states on regressive family laws and communities that promote and administer patriarchal structures that aim to keep power intact. South Sudanese WHRDs refugees continue to face state surveillance, and are targeted even though they have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

Just as the CIVICUS's report on the challenges of WHRDs show that their work diagnoses the power of authorities who are men, reforms on family laws also challenge patriarchal religious states, cultures, communities, and structures. In the quest for progressive and egalitarian societal changes, WHRDs are thus exposed to a number of harms by challenging the status quo.

Organising Using Online Spaces

Given the various threats Muslim WHRDs face organizing offline, online spaces present an opportunity to gain more coverage, organise against religious patriarchal systems and practices despite on-ground constraints and advocate for the rights of women, including progressive family laws. This has been described as follows: "Different groups of people come together under different conditions and with varying extent and power, sometimes in 'counterpublics'—groups coming together to oppose the more hegemonic public sphere and ideologies." (Tufekci, 2018). Awino Okech (2021) shares how feminists use digital counterpublics to collectively grieve femicides in Kenya and South Africa, and demand justice. WHRDs have used digital spaces to share information on rape, gender-based violence, and as an avenue to locate missing persons. They engage in critical conversations online on violence against women, oppressive laws and petition for reforms.

However, using digital spaces as resistance sites is not limited to feminists. The 2011 Egyptian Revolution has been cited as one of the early examples of how activists and HRDs leveraged digital media to rally and organise protests for offline action (Friedman,2019). In April 2019, despite internet shutdowns in Sudan, HRDs and activists were able to bypass internet blockages to share stories, and also made use of both personal and online transnational networks. Millions of people shared images of the protests against the totalitarian government, including the inspirational picture of Alaa Salah on top of a car, which turned into a global symbol for the protest (Ahmed, 2019). The Sudanese protests continued, and thousands of anti-coup activists led protests against military rule. While there have been Internet shutdowns, HRDs across the country still use their digitally networked publics to share information on the country's state of affairs. Similar tactics were employed in the Ethiopian civil war, and during elections in Uganda, whereby WHRDs and political opposition used the online space as an information sharing platform to hold the state accountable despite internet shutdowns.

As digital technologies become integral to today's activism and social movements, many protests are referred to by their hashtags—the Twitter convention for marking a topic (Tufekci, 2018). For instance, the 2019 Sudan protest was marked by #BlueforSudan; the online protest to release the Ugandan academic and activist Stella Nyanzi from jail for speaking out against the Ugandan President was marked with #FreeStellaNyanzi. The 2020 anti-police brutality protest and reform in Nigeria used the #EndSARs hashtag. Demands for justice for femicide victims and sexual violence survivors in South Africa was marked by #TotalShutdownSA, and in Kenya #TotalShutdownKE, #JusticeforSharon.The #MosqueMetoo also gave Muslim women a space to also address sexual violence in Islamic institutions and spaces such as the mosque. It was co-opted in different locations, including Nigeria's #ArewaMeToo.

Altogether, these scenarios demonstrate how WHRDs have come to rely on technology's affordances — what a given technology allows and enables — to carry out demands and threaten dominant power towards achieving liberation for communities.

Online Violence and Threats

As previously mentioned, online spaces are not free from threats. WHRDs are still targeted online and face both online and offline attacks and harms along this continuum (Graham-Harrison,2021). "There is nothing virtual about online violence. It has become the new frontline in journalism safety - and women journalists sit at the epicentre of risk," a UNESCO (2021, pp.5) research report explains. While the research focuses on women journalists, it presents insights to the threats WHRDs (including journalists in this case) experience. The research shows that online violence against WHRDs is designed "to belittle, humiliate, and shame; induce fear, silence, and retreat; discredit them professionally, undermining accountability, journalism and trust in facts" (Rothschild,2021).

While the online space has given WHRDs alternative publics through which to advocate and mobilise for the liberation of all people, it has also given those who wish to harm them omnipresence. The omnipresence that online spaces afford to aggressors at the expense of WHRDs can be synonymous with surveillance. WHRDs have reported that "networked misogyny and gaslighting intersect with racism, religious bigotry, homophobia and other forms of discrimination to threaten women them, severely and disproportionately" (Graham-Harrison,2021). Additionally, the omnipresence of online hate and attacks include the use of facial recognition systems by government and private agencies to target individuals. WHRDs have also reported the use of Israel's Pegasus software to monitor them (Saine, 2021). Surveillance also happens in the physical public as well as through mobile devices. Surveillance technologies continue to be used to target WHRDs, the known effects of these are both psychological and physical. UNESCO reported that one in ten had sought medical or psychological help after being targeted, and one in three had started self-censoring as a result of online intimidation.

Self-censorship is a prevalent consequence of omnipresence of an unknown cybergaze. Given that WHRDs are constantly targeted, surveillance creates paranoia that one is being watched. This fear (Rothschild,2021) that WHRDs have been validated through numerous research studies. WHRDs' work openly defies power, hence the violence and threat of violence they face is a tactic to intimidate them. In this case, both state and non-state actors use the functionality of surveillance that makes power visible yet unverified, thus causing WHRDs to constantly 'watch their backs' and self-censor.

WHRDs in other parts of the world have shared that they have been targets of online gender-based violence (OGBV), such as deepfakes, where their images are digitally manipulated, oftentimes to portray them as sexually promiscuous (Tarrawnah, 2020). All of these actions represent violent threats and risks against WHRDs.

Gaps in Literature and the Need for Islamic Feminisms and Transnational Solidarity

One of the key points MWHRDs have highlighted is that they are considered traitors of the Islamic religion for challenging religious patriarchal norms and structures. Some MWHRDs' work, to paraphrase Fatima Seedat, goes beyond the normative resistance of religious patriarchy that uses the rhetoric of 'the status of women in Islam' (Seedat, 2013). A notable observation for this research is the gaps in literature on MWHRDs in Africa and the GHoA for that matter. These gaps exist as a result of the 'ways sub-Saharan African Muslim women tend to be overlooked in Islamic feminist thinking, of which the more predominant focus is the Middle East and Arab world' (Dosekun 2021, pp. 47-63). This is evident in the locations of work that exist on MWHRDs. At the same time, MWHRDs in the GHoA employ strategies that include working with male leaders to give them access to the communities they work with and ensure their safety. Meanwhile, some of these tactics are often considered to be more conservative and less radical. In truth, the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house (Lorde, 2007), yet considering the contexts of MWHRDs in the GHoA region, it serves as an entry point.

In the same manner, Muslim activists are also critical of the label 'feminist' due to what Amina Wadud (2006) explains as the impossible distinction of feminism from Western ideologies given its origins. Likewise, Muslim scholars who claim feminism as a methodological and political practice are accused of "taking Islam for granted" (Seedat 2013, pp 414). All these scholars, where they label themselves as feminist, gender activist or non-feminist, work to challenge masculine, religious hegemonies (Seedat,2013). It is because of such events that bell hooks reminds us as that one does not need to claim the word feminist to do feminist work (Hooks, 1991).

Additionally the polarities and contestations of Islam and feminism; the rejection of the label 'feminism' by many Muslim women, and activists, may play a role in the ways African Muslim women are ignored in feminist discourses. The inward resistance to feminism is a result of the dehumanising positions that ignores Muslim women's agency and assumes a saviour complex role (Sackur, 2021). It is through these arguments and mistrust that some Muslim feminists coined 'Islamic feminisms' as a political position that is critical of secular and western feminisms but at the same time seeks to dismantle religious patriarchy. Islamic feminisms, in this case, according to Margot Badran (1999, pp. 41-57), is "the conceptual and political location that will occupy a middle space, or independent site, between secular feminism and masculinist Islamism."
Meanwhile, to address the issues of African women Shirin Edwin (2016) also proposed an "African-Islamic" feminist theory that attends to the specificities of such women's lives and faith, including the Africanness of both Islam and feminism". MWHRDs occupy the space between Western feminisms and religion. They embody bell hooks' (1991) argument on not needing to self-identify as feminist to contribute to feminist's work.

Online organising, as shown in earlier sections, allows MWHRDs to build networks and solidarity with communities beyond their borders. Actions of solidarity as seen in #BlueforSudan amongst others tell the stories of women who are unable to share their realities due to the targeted threats they face and internet shutdowns that limit communication. While MWHRDs work to protect themselves, their communities and nations from oppressive religious states, norms and structure, broader feminisms must also work towards protecting MWHRDs. The first step towards supporting MWHRDs' work is to not leave out their lives and experiences from our theories and practice, but contribute to Edwin and Badran's Islamic feminisms, and fill the gaps in knowledge where we have the necessary. This way, issues pertaining to the experiences of MWHRDs would not be overlooked and underreported and we would be able to center the material needs of Muslim women in our discourse towards liberatory futures.

Actions and Policies to Protect WHRDs and their Gaps

The limited actions to protect MWHRDs inspired women's organisations and networks to call on African nations to honour both the Maputo Protocol and the United Nations Declaration on Human Right Defenders. The UN Declaration requires states to uphold protection for all people, support the rights of HRDs and work and collaborate peacefully with HRDs (OHCHR,n.d). The Maputo Protocol, which went into effect in 2005, guarantees comprehensive rights to women regarding political participation, social and political equality with men and improved autonomy regarding reproductive health decisions. However, many of these efforts still remain as declarations and protocols, and not implemented actions.

Organisations such as the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) shared some of the steps they take in protecting WHRDs, which include, collaboration and coordination with networks of WHRDs to strengthen responses to safety and protection; supporting regional networks and organisations to promote self-care; documenting and increasing visibility of the risks they face and; Mobilising urgent responses of international solidarity for WHRDs at risk (AWID, 2019). Various NGOs issue statements supporting HRDs, such as a recent statement by SIHA Network expressing solidarity with women, girls, and at-risk populations and supporting the work of HRDs in the conflict in Ethiopia (Siha,2021).

One notable effort towards protecting and ensuring the digital safety of WHRDs is the Coalition Against Online Violence. The coalition provides comprehensive resources to assist WHRDs tackle various forms of OGBV, including doxxing, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, responding to abusers, documenting and reporting abuse, digital security and many more. They also provide specific help and emergency assistance, though their work is limited to journalists (Coalition Against Online Violence, 2021) .

For the most part, long term actions and resources towards the digital security of MWHRDs remain limited as many tend to focus on the MENA region and West Asia, with little resources or action dedicated to the GHoA region.

Methodological Approach

As part of this research report, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with eleven women human right defenders (WHRDs) and organisations from Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Sudan, Somalia and Somaliland. The WHRDs ecosystem in GHoA was mapped, including individual advocates. All the participants' names and identities have been anonymised, and represented with participant IDs and country. For example, 'Participant B, Ethiopia' and 'Participant F, Tanzania.'

The interviews were conducted to understand the lived experiences of the WHRDs, both in online and offline spaces. Interviews also assessed how they use online media for their work and its limitations. Through the interviews we were able to understand and map out the threats and risks of their work, online and offline. The research also used surveys to reach more WHRDs who were not available via in-person interviews. Survey respondents are identified in the research with reference to their country, such as 'Survey Respondent, Ethiopia.'

Purposive sampling was employed to select MWHRDs from our existing database for the qualitative interviews and semi-quantitative survey. This method was complemented with a snowball sampling where interview participants circulated the research survey within their networks of other MWHRDs in the region.

Finally, we conducted a literature review to understand the axes of power that exist at the intersection of gender, religion and technology. We use existing feminist research frameworks on researching the digital environment to explore the lived experiences of WHRDs online. The research also uses decolonial feminist theories and points of query to understand the threats Muslim WHRDs face online and how they navigate these forms of threats. By highlighting lived experiences of WHRDs at the margins of people affected by digital threats, this report uses feminist thoughts on gendered violence and surveillance to examine how aggressors enact violence and control WHRDs.

Limitations

The goal of this research was to explore and map out the digital realities and harms faced by MWHRDs in GHoA including Ethiopia, Somalia and Somaliland, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. However, due to limitations in internet accessibility and ongoing internet shutdowns, many MWHRDs were unable to either respond to the survey or engage in in-person interviews. Reaching our research interviewees in general was challenging, given the current social and political realities. For instance, at the time of the research (December 2021), Sudan was embroiled in a coup, and the internet was shut down as a result. Countries such as Ethiopia were also going through internal conflicts which may have also affected the response rate for this research. Generally, the threats and risks WHRDs face from unknown actors may have played a role in what they decide to engage with.

Findings

Scope of Work for Muslim Women Human Right Defenders (MWHRDs)

The MWHRDs interviewed mainly work within the domain of family law. Their work also includes helping survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), assisting women through financial liberation, teaching digital strategies, and leadership skills, amongst others. In countries with totalitarian regimes, WHRDs also work on peace building advocacy. They also collaborate with communities and other organisations to achieve various outcomes, such as community counselling of survivors of GBV, promoting education amongst young girls and assisting with transformative agricultural practices.

The Use and Limitations of Digital Media

MWHRD shared that they use digital media technologies such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, emails, Zoom and Signal (for secure communication). Most of the WHRDs who use social media use Facebook and Whatsapp, whereas a few use Instagram or Twitter. Some of the WHRDs explained that depending on their location, specifically when working in the Middle East, they are unable to use the call feature of WhatsApp, so they rely on apps such as IMO. Additionally, one organisation shared that they moved all company-wide personal communication to Signal and urged all their employees to not communicate work-related topics via Whatsapp, but only on Signal. They use platforms such as Facebook and Zoom for webinars, but many shared that their Facebook accounts are for personal use and they do not use it for advocacy.

Four out of ten interviewed WHRDs shared that they or their organisation used social media for their work. However, their strategies vary based on country and context. For instance, all WHRDs shared that they use social media platforms for advocacy, to promote their work, and to share knowledge with people who do not have physical access to their organisation. According to participant A, Uganda, WhatsApp and Zoom online conference tools come in handy for discussions.

Yet, a few organisations shared that while they use social media for advocacy, information dissemination on work on gender, family laws, human rights and Islam, they mainly use it from a ‘proactive’ perspective. That is, they do not place themselves in the forefront of fighting for Muslim family laws, or challenging authoritarian regimes, but rather support activists with the resources and skills they need. While they might publish certain reports from their work, they still occupy a third-party role as organisations that primarily support the work of activists. On the other hand, individual activists share that they use their personal platforms as sites for resistance and advocacy, where they share information on topics of their interest. They also use it for community engagement, while connecting with networks of people.

The context of the work of many Muslim WHRDs influences their decision to use digital media. Some of the interviewees shared that due to the fact that they work with people in remote areas, at the local level, they do not have the incentive to ‘promote’ their work online. The lack of incentive towards using digital media was due to the potential threats that the space presents. Apart from this, other issues with the use of digital media also include the lack of financial support to purchase data or devices, and digital skills. Altogether, these present issues of accessibility with regards to skills, finances and reach. An added layer to these limitations regarding accessibility and use is the lack of appropriate digital security skills which is ‘a secure way to share information online’.

A few WHRDs explained that while they have challenges training their staff to effectively use digital platforms, the idea that it may expose them to more threats without being able to protect themselves discourages them from using such spaces.

For many WHRDs, the lack of national and transnational visibility is a protective mechanism. Not using social media to amplify their work is a security strategy. For instance, two Somali interviewees explained that using social media is a security threat. At the same time, the organisations they work for do not publicise their employees online. Participant E, Somalia explained that she speaks on radio shows to educate people on gender-based violence and women’s rights, but does not share her name because of potential threats she might face. Yet, she highlighted that there are people who know her voice and that is something she cannot control.

Still, their lack of use is not absolute, as a few shared that they understand the benefits because spaces such as WhatsApp help them to connect and communicate with others easily. Yet the potential threats digital spaces present constantly discourage MWHRDs.

Mapped Threats

Threats as a Result of Online Visibility

Main Actors Who Threaten MWHRDs and Modes of Attack

The three key actors that were mentioned by interviewees as harming MWHRDs within their offline and online spaces are ***religious insurgents/extremists and related communities, the State, and men.*** The table below provides more insight into the actions that have been taken or threatened against MWHRDs and their intersections based on the aggressor's power.

Key Actors	Modes of Attack	Remarks from MWHRDs[2]
Religious leaders /communities/ insurgents	Murder threats, verbal abuse, harassment, religious propaganda.	***"No, I do not post my work online because of extremist groups."*** Participant E, Somalia ***"We are threatened when we speak on gender and religion. The issue is mostly when we attempt to advocate for women's right in Islam."*** Participant C, Somalia ***"To them, advocating for progressive Islamic family laws and against violence or the betterment of women is wrong."*** Participant B, South Sudan
The State	Targeting online and offline, surveillance, sexual violence, troll and misinformation bots, financial violence, threat of persecution	***"State intelligence targets you, harasses you and interrogates you."*** Participant F, Uganda ***"The previous government, until 2018, did not allow people to work in advocacy. WHRDs were scared, so we were only allowed to work in the service area. This affected our online advocacy in general."*** Participant M, Ethiopia
Men	Harassment, sexual violence (including sharing inappropriate pictures to WHRDs' DMs), physical threats, verbal abuse, non-consensual image sharing (NCII) and trolling	***"Most of the online harassment were men. Also, some of the time, you feel that anguish is a man's language, but you can't really tell from the name because it's like, all those funny names for Facebook or Twitter accounts, you never really know the person."*** Participant H, Uganda ***"When they post abusive comments in Arabic, I respond to them. Then, they get into my Direct Messages (DM), sending abusive language and racial slurs."*** Participant L, Ethiopia
Women	Verbal abuse and harassment	***"Some women who have normalised the suffering they go through in the name of religion."*** Survey respondent, South Sudan ***"Few women who feel comfortable in male-dominated societies."*** Survey respondent, Uganda
Everyone	Hacking, doxxing (sharing personal information online without consent), non-consensual image sharing, trolling and threats of killing.	Hacking was attributed to 'everyone' by the MWHRDs because they happen from unknown sources, however, many suspect that these are government coordinated. ***"You cannot tell as they do not show themselves and their names."*** - Survey respondent, South Sudan ***"Someone who was anonymous, texted me directly from Twitter. The person found my number, and sent me an SMS. So yes, they are mostly anonymous."*** Participant S, Tanzania

---

[2] All italicised remarks are direct quotes from MWHRDs

Understanding the Threats MWHRDs Face

MWHRDs face various forms of threats as a result of their work reforming oppressive laws and systems, including peace building initiatives, advocacy and ensuring safety for women and girls. The threats they face are not limited to their online visibility. WHRDs face forms of online gender-based violence which also transcend into the offline space, hence the effect it has on their work and livelihoods.

The forms of threats they face due to their visibility includes bullying, verbal abuse, targeted harassment, tracking and surveillance.

Participant M, Ethiopia, who works on family laws, shared that she, as well as her friends, usually receive attacks through direct messages (DM), including unsolicited images. Online, she sheds light on the political conflict in Ethiopia in an attempt to debunk misconceptions, misinformation and myths. Additionally, her work on gender also gives rise to the issues she faces and has faced. The participant shared that most of the aggressors attack her on the personal level with aggressive abuse.

In Tanzania, an organisation that focuses on training young girls and women on leadership shared that they receive online attacks because of their work on women's rights. Their work inherently challenges patriarchal norms. Participant S, Tanzania, expressed that most people's aim is to mould women to specific societal norms or standards, which the organisation actively resists. The participant from the organisation also added that when a woman is in a leadership position, she is held to unrealistic standards. For example, as a leader in her organisation, she is bullied for having a personality and private life outside of her work.

Similarly, a MWHRD from South Sudan explained that she faces harassment and bullying on her personal account. The WHRD shared that people who know her personally and are aware of the work she does attempt to derail the conversation by making unwanted sexual advances.
Furthermore, non-Muslims also leverage Islamophobic arguments against her online. The participant added that Islamic leaders who attend in-person events on human rights still use social media as a site to bully and harass WHRDs. *"Facebook and Twitter are what is used by many South Sudanese; even the people we are afraid of use this platform. So sometimes you fear posting because certain people may see it and attack you,"* Participant B, South Sudan. She also gave an account where she received messages and comments that told her that they do not believe she will be able to solve the problems of Muslims because they have existed for centuries, which she expressed to be demoralising.

Additionally, a multi-national organization's use of Islamic feminism to resist religious patriarchal systems and norms also causes pushback from conservative religious communities. As a result, the major pushback they face includes the idea that religion and feminism are incompatible. As such, in the past, they have faced online attacks and backlash on their publications, and Zoombombings of online events where people raid and disrupt the events in an attempt to challenge the narratives. This has led the organization to avoid promoting events or opportunities online, which in turn serves to keep other Muslim women away from the potential knowledge or opportunities that may have been provided. The organisation has also faced digital threats where their websites have been hacked.

Furthermore, other similar organisations that work on the multi-national level expressed that they faced identical threats. Given their location in a police state, which the participant shared to be very volatile, the major digital threats they faced are the risk of being hacked, with personal, confidential and sensitive data of the organisation being exposed to the public. Other threats include shutdowns on communication channels by totalitarian states, which impedes on their work as an organisation that assists WHRDs on advocacy, cultural storytelling, digital security, and communication in general.

Respondents also shared that the activists they work with face threats of persecution and even threats of murder, particularly if they have a higher profile. They also face issues of stalking, tracing, and repeated harassment. Sometimes WHRDs are pressured to leave their places of work, and public and private institutions are warned to not hire them. As such, when one is a visible WHRD, the risks are higher. They are unable to secure gainful employment, or are required to work in the informal sector, in a family business or independently. Hacking and tracking their social media accounts are also significant threats to their work.

The visibility of WHRDs remains crucial in the type of experiences they tend to face. Digital media affords this visibility, hence WHRDs in the GHoA have to employ very discreet and innovative tactics to subvert unknown harms and aggression.

Topical, Locational and Political Threats

Visibility and the type of work that Muslim WHRDs undertake are closely correlated with the types of aggression that they face. For instance, an Ethiopian organisation explained that they usually receive support from the religious community on topics of financial empowerment, transformative agriculture and gender-based violence at the community level. However, this support ends when they begin to advocate for sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). The participant shared that topics on abortion rights and safe abortions are met with reluctance.

The topic of SRHR signifies freedom - the freedom for women and young girls to be the sole decision makers and controllers of their bodies. It directly challenges the patriarchal control of women's bodies through their reproductive health, and progress within this topic represents women's power over their lives and bodies. This partly explains the religious community's strictly drawn boundary with regards to WHRDs' work on the topic.

Similarly, in Uganda, a participant who works as a community counsellor expressed that issues pertaining to gender-based violence are resisted by men within the communities she works with. In a case where there is a teenage pregnancy, she explained that peoples' response is to marry off the young girl even when she has not reached the age of legal marriage. Additionally, according to the Ugandan WHRD, men are mostly the perpetrators of gender-based violence, hence their resistance to the subject. Comparably, in South Sudan when WHRDs speak of gender-based violence, they receive harassment from both religious leaders and Islamophobes. These accounts show that the collaboration between WHRDs and community leaders, who are often men, can only exist if the activists remain within the prescribed boundaries set, and do not explore territories that threaten patriarchal power.

Within volatile political locations, such as Ethiopia, activists mentioned that part of the topics that incite online violence include speaking on the current regional conflict. WHRDs also work on debunking fake news, which has also been a cause of online gender-based violence, even amongst friends. Furthermore, Muslim WHRDs across the region highlighted that working on women's rights issues is considered as 'challenging' men's authority. They further explained that speaking on equality, family law reforms, and harmful cultural and religious norms is considered bringing Western ideologies and liberalist views to the Muslim religion. One WHRD added that part of this reasoning is because religion has been used to justify patriarchal oppression, hence the pushback they constantly receive as women who are "challenging Islam." - Participant B, South Sudan

Also, in Ethiopia, WHRDs highlighted that for the past ten years, NGOs and activists were only permitted to work within the service sector. It was only a few years ago that civil society was allowed to work on advocacy-related issues. Advocacy within a totalitarian state was dangerous; they only began to work within this domain under the new government. However, this remains the reality of WHRDs in Sudan, where WHRDs and organisations who work on art, culture, peace building and family law are targets of both online and offline harm. Another organisation that works in Sudan shared that employees have been questioned and detained. The rising threats in the location forced them to close down one of their offices.

The threats Muslim WHRDs face do not radically differ from platform to platform. However, a few shared that they receive threats on Facebook because it is a space they use more frequently. Others also mentioned that harassment is more rampant on Twitter compared to Facebook. These findings that there is more harassment on Twitter as compared to Facebook are substantiated by recent research conducted through a social media analysis of aspiring women politicians during the 2021 Uganda General Elections (Kakande et al, 2021).

Additionally, organisation-wide threats also mean being wary of hackers, Zoombombers, and internet shutdowns. Internet shutdowns prevent freedom of expression and pose communication threats when WHRDs are cut off from their networks and communities. Internet shutdowns also cause anxiety when WHRDs are unable to protect themselves and each other due to lack of information.

Challenges and Concerns of MWHRDs

Key Challenges and Concerns of MWHRDs In the GHoA

Country	Challenges	Concerns
Sudan South Sudan Somalia Somaliland	The intersection of religion, gender and the state	• Unable to freely carry out gender related work without the fear of intimidation and harassment. • Moral shaming of MWHRDs as betrayers of Islam. • Detention, physical and sexual violence.
Sudan Ethiopia Uganda South Sudan Tanzania	Funding to support digital advocacy	• Unable to effectively engage in online advocacy. • Limits how much protection they can access.
South Sudan Somalia Somaliland Sudan	Online security and safety	• Not being able to publish work. • Limiting visibility which is integral to MWHRDs work.
All seven countries	Digital inequalities	• Limit in how much access they have to online spaces. • Creates boundaries to the impact they can have within their communities and societies. • Effects on ensuring their digital security because skills are limited.

Note: The categorisation of issues and concerns is based on accounts of WHRDs, but may not be limited to these countries.

Feminist Advocacy, a Betrayal of Islam, and Good Muslims

MWHRDs shared that their work is often considered as an intrusion of Western/Northern value systems in Islam and African cultures. Religion continues to form an integral aspect of people's lives and their core beliefs. However, MWHRDs complicate religious beliefs by advocating for change against gender essentialist and patriarchal practices, norms and structures. To many people, religion serves as a prescribed set of ethical rules towards engaging with people and flourishing as a community. It also plays a role in how people come to understand and access their sense of being, which includes their gender and sexual orientations. Yet, men continue to be the understanding and interaction of themselves.

For instance, the usual rebuttal against people who question Islamic laws of inheritance is that women are meant to join other families through marriage whereas men continue to build the family name and lineage (Moghadam,2004). Another popular rhetoric against MWHRDs is that "Islam gave women rights" and that if a person is truly Muslim, they would put Islam at the forefront without needing feminist advocacy (Sanusi,2020). Along these lines, the majority of the MWHRDs shared sentiments that their advocacy on better family laws is deemed as Western. A MWHRD, Participant M, Ethiopia, for example, explained that the religious community believes human rights defenders are introducing Western values to the religion. The WHRD explained that oppression is justified through religious interpretations, thus women who work on gender and family-laws related issues are outcasted and "not considered as a good Muslims to even raise awareness about issues regarding the Muslim family laws." Participant B, South Sudan, shared similar experiences where she too highlighted that advocating for better family laws was often conflated with bringing western ideals into Islam. The participant also pointed out that part of the challenged they face are community leaders reminding them that women should not lead men and accuse them of spoiling the religion with their feminism. Meanwhile the majority of the MWHRDs shared sentiments where they expressed their concern for the idea that advocacy on issues within Islamic family law is deemed Western.

Muslim communities have expressed how MWHRDs and feminists make them look bad by exposing the violence women-identifying and queer people face within the community. However, Mona Eltahawy reminds us that men, who are often the perpetrators of violence, make Islam look 'bad' on their own. Eltahawy also explains that 'looking bad' should not be the focal concern for Muslim communities, but rather they should aim to address religious patriarchal violence. Yet, the Islamophobic experiences of Muslim communities as minoritised groups within a euro-patriarchal world also problematizes advocacy for family law in the religion.

At the same time, some Muslim gender scholars mentioned that advocates who focus on feminist activism "take Islam for granted" (Seedat, 2013). Taking Islam for granted in this research is used to analyse what MWHRDs mean when they say they are not seen as 'good Muslims.' A good Muslim, in the dominant argument, recognises the rights Islam gave women hundreds of years ago and does not attempt to reinterpret Islamic jurisprudence to be equitable. Concurrently, for MWHRDs their advocacy is an action that acknowledges that women in Islam have rights. Hence, does betrayal only happen when women actively resist the structures and hegemonies that oppress them?

Religion plays a significant role in how communities come to understand and interact with gender. As such, it is used to enforce morality, gendered norms, and heteropatriarchal values. Family law represents all three norms and hegemonies. Participant J, Sudan, explained that when they challenge these social norms and attempt to shed light on the various forms of Islamic law, including *Shari'a*[3] and *hadana*, they are subjected to verbal abuse online and violent threats. Participant F, Uganda said, *"We have been called bitches and whores. We have been told we are trying to loosen Muslim girls and women and we are trying to bring in western values. Sometimes they call us corrupt, that we are just using the money from the western organisations, so that we can sustain our work somehow without really impacting our different constituencies."* She also added that MWHRDs within their networks who share the organisation's work also receive threats. The state threats they face also include situations where they have been unable to work from their physical offices in Sudan because of the constant intimidation the organisation's staff received.

The interviewees shared the need to approach the sensitivities of religion and gender cautiously. One interviewee, Participant M Ethiopia, explained that: "Islamic family law reforms are in its early stage since it is not codified. As such making it important for WHRDs to strategically organise around the topic."

Presence as Absence: A Power Analysis of Stakeholders

What does it mean for certain bodies to be present yet absent within cyberspaces? The accounts of MWHRDs show how they develop online relations that construct their presence as absences (Salman,2021). Gendered power structures and dynamics come into play in their experiences online and offline. Dr. Pumla Dineo Gqola's Female Fear Factory explains that MWHRDs are fluent in language of the fear factory and their work refuses to conform to its boundaries. "Public spaces are the domain of the masculine" and the violence of religious states and communities against MWHRDs is to repeatedly remind them of this structure through pain (Gqola,2021). For instance, work on gendered digital threats shows that WHRDs reported being threatened on social media platforms more frequently than men (28.3% of WHRDs compared to 23.3% of male HRDs) (Vigliar,2021). Actors who are often men and state authorities rely on gendered social and structural inequalities to threaten MWHRDs. Human rights work requires visibility to share stories of the realities of women and demand reforms in family laws. Visibility in this sense makes use of the concept of "there is power in numbers," as such when aggressors threaten MWHRDs they undermine the common tactic used within the space. The added layer of being a Muslim woman comes to play in the erasure of Muslim women's reality, hence when their work within the Muslim communities is compromised, it further exacerbates the already existing inequality.

MWHRDs are forced to employ different tactics towards achieving their goal. Many often cited the fatigue of constantly circumventing violence, and internet security threats. Others also shared that it becomes distracting to always focus on ways to be secure. A Ugandan-based multinational WHRD network, Participant F, explained that being secure requires teams of people who vet the content they publish based on the audience, message and how people respond on different social media sites which stretches the capacity of their communication team. In the case where most MWHRDs who work individually struggle financially, they are unable to employ teams of people to assess their content. As such, having to find ways of filtering their identities, engagement, and work, which translates to ‘presence’ yet absence.

---

[3] Shari'a acts as codes for living that all Muslims should adhere to, including prayers, fasting and donations to the poor etc.

In the following accounts, MWHRDs show how the dynamics of visible, invisible, and hidden powers come to play in their experiences online and offline.

> *We support human rights advocates on digital security, holistic security, and how to create content that can further their agenda and their work. Some of the threats they face as described by them in our training or workshops are threat of persecution, threats of killing; if they are high profile, they are tracked, traced and harassed. Sometimes people are persecuted for leaving their work. Public and private institutions are not allowed to hire them. So it depends if you are a notable activist, then the risks are higher, you cannot get a job. You have to work in the informal sector, or like in a family business or something like that, or start your own thing that's a bit discreet so that they can't trace you. Also, people who always suffer from being hacked are being traced on their accounts.*
> ***- Participant J Sudan.***

> *I know of colleagues who were threatened that they will be killed by religious extremist groups.* ***- Participant H Uganda***

> *No, I do not share my work on my personal Facebook because of the potential threat I face. Many people believe in the wrong things about gender, especially gender-based violence.* ***- Participant C Somalia***

> *That me and my whole country is going to get F***ed, was one of the latest dms I received.* ***- Survey respondent, Ethiopia***

> *When we receive online threats, we are forced to compromise during our work and constantly consider our security. We stop addressing the things we are supposed to work on.* ***- Participant A, Uganda***

These narratives demonstrate how patriarchal powers use very innovative means to enact violence against MWHRDs. At the same time, these power structures and dynamics exist at the axes of the matrix of domination, which is the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and interpersonal domains of oppression.

The state organises structural forms of oppression through financial laws that regulate the use of social media. A MWHRD who works in rural Uganda shared that while connectivity in remote areas is low, accessing data plans makes it harder to consistently advocate online. In addition, MWHRDs from Sudan and Uganda reported that they are unable to engage in formal employment, thus further deepening the power of state and non-state actors against MWHRDs. This means of oppression relies on the already existing gender pay and work gaps to enact violence against MWHRDs and minority communities. Additionally, when states use intelligence systems and data to monitor and track WHRDs they leverage sophisticated forms of technology available to them that allow them to watch and control the actions of WHRDs.

> *In Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia, most of the regimes use religion to sustain their cause. In South Sudan to be specific, they use the traditions. They have a system where the traditions come before the state laws and policies and this intersects with religion.* ***- Participant F, Uganda (multinational network)***

States use religion to sustain oppression against marginalised people, and moral policing and surveillance to establish structural control over these populations. As such, hegemonic forms of oppression happen through moral policing and state surveillance. Within this domain of power MWHRDs are accused of corrupting Muslim girls through their advocacy and being 'bad Muslims'. For example, Participant B, South Sudan, highlighted that many people believe WHRDs are taking power away from them by advocating for equal family law, and against gender-based violence. She explained that South Sudan is a patriarchal society where the men in leadership consider the work of MWHRDs as a threat that challenges their power, thus targeting advocates who work on gender and family law.

Furthermore, when asked who the main actors of violence against them online are, a survey respondent said, "We hope to know as well because these people hide themselves." Her response provides an entry into how weaponised anonymity online also represents forms of hidden powers where abusers use their power to threaten and harm WHRDs. Aggressors online are aware of their power, and may not need to be anonymous to perform violent actions against WHRDs. Yet, they choose to use tools such as anonymity that allows WHRDs protect themselves.

Meanwhile, some of the MWHRDs expressed the feeling that religious communities use religion to validate oppressive practices and norms. Hence, hegemonic power plays out invisibly where gendered religious norms and practices are cited as valid means for violence against MWHRDs. When MWHRDs are considered to be religiously defiant, visible, hidden and invisible powers garner violent actions through interpersonal relations with communities and the disciplinary power of the state that claims to punish women who defy religious norms. As such, 'everyone' as a threat to MWHRDs, signifies power that is both visible yet unverifiable, which means that MWHRDs are unable to actively identify all the forms of threats they face. This forces them to limit their online interaction and visibility, thus reinstating the fear factory MWHRDs undermine in the first place. In this way, MWHRDs consider all the structural, hegemonic, disciplinary and interpersonal layers of oppression as they conduct their work, which means having to engage strategically where they do not always have to be outwardly 'present.'

How Aggressors Enact Violence

We break down the matrix of domination using concepts of surveillance.

Violence against WHRDs happens due to both online and offline factors that are gendered, political and cultural in nature. WHRDs experience online violence because they are women who exist within a public space and gendered social dynamics come into play in their experiences online. Meanwhile, their work as WHRDs influence the level of threats they face.

Aggressors, who are often religious leaders, the state, men online and to an extent other women, utilise various functionalities of surveillance. They use both 'soft surveillance' and traditional surveillance to control and discipline WHRDs. With regards to soft surveillance, WHRDs shared the fear of their personal information being exposed by unknown people. They also stated that the 'visibility' is dangerous because they or their loved ones can be tracked and harassed. When it comes to active surveillance, an organisation based in Sudan shared that MWHRDs who became political at the university level are known by their colleagues who become government officials and thus are able to still target them even when they try to keep a low profile. Both scenarios show that aggressors leverage technology affordances that make surveillance "seemingly less invasive and may involve individuals willingly surrendering data, through public displays of vulnerability that are common online via cookies, internet services providers (ISPs), and social media sites,'' (Kester and Schneier, 2021). They also use the traditional forms of surveillance which come in the form of government spies and big brother surveillance technologies, while also using the panoptic surveillance that is very participatory, traditional and data-driven. Hence, the accounts of MWHRDs who say abusers weaponise anonymity, and one has to be "generally careful"; being careful here is synonymous to self-censorship.

WHRDs challenging religious patriarchal norms are considered to defy rules, hence disciplinary action against them happens as personal attacks, sexual harassment, holding them to unrealistic standards for being visible. The implications of these threats are technical, psychological, and emotional. A research participant from Tanzania shared that abuse online makes a person feel alone and may have potential self-harming effects on the victim. Additionally, women are unable to focus on their work when they spend most of their time fighting online trolls, bullies, government spies, and tracking. Women also lose entire livelihoods as a result of their work. For example, organisations that participated in this research shared that WHRDs have had to flee states or are unable to work within the formal sector. Extremely violent implications also involve killing, threats of killing and prosecution.

Finally, some of the WHRDs who participated in this research expressed that they have not considered cyberbullying as a real issue or threat to their lives. This does not suggest that they do not experience the negative effects of digital threats. However, it tells us two things. First, when harassment and threats are widespread, they become normalised actions and considered as part of reality. Second, the concept of online gender-based violence and digital insecurity remains very new, and experiences and events come to form concepts, not the other way round (Puar,2012). Thus, MWHRDs not being able to actively name or identify the series of actions against them does not invalidate their experiences. Additionally, many women still lack meaningful access to the internet and digital platforms and are unaware of the current threats posed within these platforms.

Digital Inequalities

Participant S, Tanzania shared that the rural-urban digital divide affects the work of WHRDs who work within rural areas. She explained the contextual differences: "When you engage in a digital campaign telling people to post or follow a hashtag, they would not be able to understand what you mean," thus making "social media very limiting." As such, she warns against the blanket assumption "that through social media, we can change people's lives especially when it is not widely accessible and flexible." Participant H, Uganda validated statements in the literature that addresses the constraints due to data costs. The participants also shared that communities' expectations to be paid for engagement in advocacy affects their work. In Ethiopia, Participant L explained that her organisation's website has been dormant, and they do not advocate social media to avoid the negative effects. She shared the infrastructural limitations in rural areas where they mostly affect their use of digital media for advocacy.

The digital inequalities that exist hinder WHRDs' use of social media networks for their work in general. These inequalities also include the cost of mobile data to sustain online engagements, digital skill gaps, lack of digital infrastructure in rural areas, gender-based inequalities, funding and language barriers. However, Muslim WHRDs continue to employ various tools and strategies for their security online and offline. A noteworthy account from the participants is them being unable to distinguish between threats that happen as a result of their online engagement or their offline religious, cultural and political climates, thus showing how the online transcends into offline realities.

Additionally, given that many MWHRDs we engaged with through this research shared that they do not use social media for their work also means that they have likely not engaged in digital security training. Three out of ten WHRDs interviewed have had some form of digital security training, and one out of the three participants offer the training to other WHRDs in the region. For the few who had received digital security training, they shared that it has been somewhat effective in helping them navigate online harassment and bullying. Others also shared that they are involved more in technical forms of digital training, which is insufficient for grassroot organisers.

With regards to the insufficiencies of digital security training, most participants mentioned the need for digital skills training first before delving into the security aspects. Similarly, an organisation shared that most digital security work and training is too technical, and expressed concern for how WHRDs who work at the local level would be able to disseminate this information or teach others. Work on digital security, she explained, is mostly carried out by people who are not HRDs or women who come from the region, hence are unable to understand the context in which insecurity and threats are carried out and its effects. Also, it is difficult to translate technical information to local languages, and the participant shared it was a major issue during a digital security workshop their organisation administered. She highlighted that translators constantly misinterpreted what was being said. As such, the question remains on how digital security training can be made accessible to WHRDs at the grassroots level.

Subversion: Strategies and Tools WHRDs Utilise to Protect Themselves Online

Muslim WHRDs face various forms of security threats both online and offline. Hence, they employ different tools and strategies to protect themselves.

The first form of protection shared by WHRDs is not using social media, because the understanding is that publicity makes them targets. As such, ensuring as little visibility as possible and working as a third party (which only works for organisations and not individuals) have proven to be effective. A representative from a multinational organisation in the GHoA (Participant J, Sudan) explained: "When we conduct training, we do not announce the location or the product itself until we are done with it. Sometimes we do not announce it at all. If it's too sensitive, for example, we did not publicise our holistic security training that happens in Sudan. This is because sometimes it's better to have it as a private event, rather than sharing people's photos or details of the training, so people can be tracked back."

In the same light, another organisational representative based in Uganda also explained that they brainstorm on the safest ways to provide training to activists. In Participant F's, Uganda, account, she shared that when they engage in peace and security training that requires activists to travel, they make sure to advise the WHRDs to limit interpersonal interaction to avoid suspicions from state agents. This is a strategy to use until activists reach their destination, and thus far, has worked towards keeps WHRDs safe from tracking and targeted harms.

Individual activists work directly with issues on-ground; thus, they may not be able to occupy third-party positions in their line of work. On the other hand, organisations who usually employ activists or support them are able to do so. In Somalia, Participant E explained that activists in her organisation face direct threats, and she is unable to tell if the organisation is targeted because she is unable to account for it. She also added that they might not be very transparent in what they face or are able to effectively protect themselves as an organisation.

Another coping strategy to ensure safety amongst WHRDs is to collaborate with male leaders on community issues. In rural Uganda, a WHRD explained that they do not undertake any community engagement without the relevant stakeholders at the table, thus ensuring their safety. Still, this means that WHRDs can only work on issues approved by these predominantly male leaders, as seen in the case of both Uganda and Ethiopia where WHRDs are unable to work on issues that directly diagnose masculine power.

On a more personal level, a few WHRDs expressed that they mostly use the block and report functionalities within social media platforms. They noted that it is not a long-term solution for structural change, but has worked for them in the short term. Another personal strategy was the use of communities where they share experiences of harassment and come up with internal protective mechanisms and supportive structures. The support received through feminist, HRD and friendship communities was cited by the participants as important towards combating the psychological effects of the threats they face. Also, communities come in handy when WHRDs need to omit certain information about their work, or require some form of alternative documentation and approval to travel. They also serve as safe houses for each other in the case they are doxxed, and their private information is revealed.

Most organisations who work on human rights and family law also shared that they make sure to use end-to-end encrypted messaging platforms such as Signal to protect themselves against hackers and third-party access. They also ensure to constantly update and change their passwords for all platforms, including social media platforms. When it comes to their online engagement, WHRD organisations emphasise the importance of remaining professional. In the case where they posted activist content, they made sure to customise it to the platform's style of messaging. For instance, on Facebook (Meta) information they make sure to use more straightforward language without any underlying meaning or connotations whereas on Twitter, language could be used more freely. Additionally, engaging in mainstream languages such as English in Sudan, limits the audience that it may reach, hence extremist groups are unable to come across the work. Similarly, using Arabic language within a context that is most appropriate also helps them navigate threats.

> *I think there are a lot of women who are visible and they take a lot of courage to do that but not everyone can afford visibility. Sometimes there are forces at home that prevent you from being visible. There is family pressure, and all kinds of internal social pressure that cannot allow people to be very visible, so I do not believe that we should expect it from everyone.* ***- Participant J, Sudan.***

Publicity, as cited, remains one of the biggest challenges WHRDs in the GHoA face. "I think the one thing that a lot of women human right defenders have really expressed is like they try to keep a low profile. Because when they appear, or make too much noise, they become targets. So a lot of them try to work underground." Participant J, Sudan.

Hence, when WHRDs have events, for example, they make sure to share it only with specific audiences and trusted networks. In this case, digital security training is also not publicised in volatile political contexts such as Sudan where they could be tracked and targeted. Organisations also constantly vet communities and individuals for infiltrators to avoid sensitive information being leaked to state intelligence agencies.

Using the Block Feature

> *We do nothing, we just hang up the phone and continue with our lives.*
> ***- Participant E Somalia.***

MWHRDs who do not use social media yet face the digital security threats of their personal information such as phone numbers being exposed, resort to mentally blocking the threats they receive. However, mobile phones have features where a person can block numbers from contacting them, but this is limited when a person constantly receives random phone call threats.

Meanwhile, MWRHDs who use social media shared that the blocking feature online helps them to tackle threats on a personal level, but might not be effective on a more structural aspect.

> *Sometimes I think of exposing the people who send me violent DMs, but then I consider if they have families of whom this might affect, so I just block them.*
> ***- Participant M, Ethiopia.***

Seventy-five percent of survey respondents also highlighted blocking as one of the tools they use to mitigate harassment online. In addition to these features, some also constantly change personal identifiers, put their accounts private and monitor those who are 'watching' and responding to their content.

The blocking feature has come to represent the fastest and easiest way for many people to curate a safe digital space. "Even when I report an account, the platforms suggest that I have the option to block the abuser. Other times, I simply block them without reporting," Participant M, Ethiopia.

Despite blocking being the most accessible option to protect one's space online, aggressors continue to exist within the spaces of other MWHRDs. Also it gets exhausting for MWHRDs to constantly block people especially when there is mass trolling and bullying.

Community Support Networks

> *Online harassment is emotionally traumatic. When it happens, people need to have support systems they can share with. Because trust me, online harassment is killing especially if you are dealing with it alone. Sometimes you become suicidal. So I always encourage people to call someone they think can provide support and a positive environment.* ***- Participant S, Tanzania.***

Social strategies towards addressing digital security have also been found to be effective for MWHRDs' physical and psychological protection. A MWHRD who recounted a series of online harassment she faced said that she leverages her personal network and friends when such events occur. "I speak to my friends about it sometimes, but when I feel it is becoming too personal, I get out of social media," Participant M, Ethiopia.

Another MWHRD also shared that her family, friends and feminist networks play a significant role every time she is being harassed. She said, "I stopped posting on social media. People were calling me because someone posted my number on social media. He was attacking me and posting my number. So people were calling me. But, after some support from my feminist sisters with digital security skills and emotional support from my partner and friends, I was able to begin posting again regardless of the attacks I get," Participant S, Tanzania.

A transnational MWHRD network representative explained that they also provide physical protection for MWHRDs. She shared that when MWHRDs are doxxed, i.e., when their personal information is posted online, as seen in the case of the Tanzanian woman, they provide safe houses for MWHRDs and their families. The safe houses last for a few weeks and sometimes months until they are able to either permanently relocate them or return to their homes after an assessment of the threat. "If we have a survivor that we want to protect, we reach out to our networks and community of MWHRDs to make sure they can host the person for some time. We provide the hosts with all the resources they need, and also have psychologists who reach out to the survivors," Participant F, Uganda.

Existing Policy Frameworks to Protect WHRDs Online

Policies that exist to protect WHRDs include the Maputo Protocol and the United Nations Declaration on Human Right Defenders (Equalitynow,2021; United Nations, 1998). These documents call upon states and non-state actors to protect HRDs from harm and ensure that they can carry out their work without threats and threats of harm. However, these statements remain insufficient to address the online harms WHRDs face. The existing policy with regards to online engagement in Tanzania and Uganda's social media acts do not include the protection of internet users. These policies, however, are focused on protecting governments and regimes from criticism, which also limits the work of WHRDs. For instance, Tanzania's social media law makes it an offence to "ridicule, abuse or harm the reputation, prestige or status of the United Republic of Tanzania" (Karombo,2020). This closes the door to any constructive feedback and dialogue.

Additionally, only the Malabo Protocol of 2014 attempts to provide some form of data protection framework that holds governments accountable for tracking activists and HRDs. Yet only fifteen countries across the continent have signed the Protocol; none have ratified it yet (Chella, 2021). We also find that Internet shutdowns have become a prevalent tactic of states within the region, hence leaving us with the question of who holds the state accountable to data and communication breaches.

The NGO ARTICLE 19's (2020) Eastern Africa regional office attempts to address internet freedoms and freedom of speech; however, states' policies and laws on cybercrime, communication and Internet freedoms continue to fall short of international standards or are used to target individuals online.

Recommendations

Needs of MWHRDs in the GHoA

The socio-political and cultural contexts of different countries in the GHoA require strategies tailored to their realities, location, scope of work and general needs. As such, this section addresses the resources and strategies that MWHRDs may employ to mitigate and address harms within their contexts and locations.

Country	Challenges	Needs
Uganda	• Internet taxes. • Limited internet accessibility. • Lack of protective legislature. • State-facilitated threats. • Community and religious threats. • Funding. • Digital skills and security training.	**Laws and Policies:** 1. Repeal laws on Internet taxes that affect accessibility and usage. Redefine the Computer Misuse Act, the Data 2. Protection and Privacy Act (2019) and/or other Penal Laws of Uganda to adhere to international internet freedom and freedom of speech standards by removing all clauses that directly and indirectly threatens and controls the work of WHRDs. **Capacity Building:** Ugandan MWHRDs rely on men's support within communities to carry out their work. As such, MWHRDs need methods of advocacy that are not limited by male power, especially when working on issues regarding family laws and gender-based violence. **Funding:** MWHRDs in Uganda require funding to sustain their online and on-ground work. This will help them cope with internet tax laws that make access to the Internet very expensive and payments to key stakeholders that are required to allow MWHRDS to engage in community engagement spaces. **Localised Digital Skills:** Need for holistic digital skills that include creative ways to curate content online, security and protection of online identities within their country and context

Country	Challenges	Needs
Ethiopia	• Internet shutdowns during unrests. • Religious-based threats. • Moral policing. • Regional conflicts. • Online racial violence. • Internet freedom. • Funding. • Digital skills and security training.	**Laws and Policies:** 1. Fewer government monopolies around the telecommunications industry. Telcos should be allowed to operate freely without government interference. 2. Repeal the Proclamation on Hate Speech and Disinformation. 3. Legal protection against threats faced by MWHRDs, and stronger accountability mechanisms to hold state and non-state actors accountable. 4. Stricter policies that are also practical in ensuring freedom of expression. **Social Practices:** MWHRDs need safe spaces to talk to people who experienced similar threats during their advocacy. This will help us learn share strategies and create support systems to help us **Capacity Building:** 1. MHWRDs need more innovative forms of community -based advocacy that do not rely solely on male leaders to provide protection and permission. 2. Develop advocacy strategies that do not subject MWHRDs to moral policing from their communities. This means finding ways for community engagement and consensus building to debunk misconceptions and navigate issues regarding gender and religion. **Funding:** 1. MWHRDs require funding to effectively carry out their work and seek protection when needed. Financial constraints continue to affect their work, leaving them susceptible to violence without any form of personal or outsourced protection. 2. Funding is also required to help them afford digital security and engagement tools. **Digital Infrastructure:** Rural areas in Ethiopia still lack the digital infrastructure to facilitate seamless online advocacy and interaction. This means that only people in the major cities can access work by MWHRDs **Localised Digital Skills:** MWHRDs need support to develop digital skills in local languages and context that allows them to be able to creatively promote their work within their regions. **Digital Security:** Resources and toolkits that help protect MWHRDs online. These should go beyond individualistic protections like blocking, and be more structural to protect all MWHRDs.

Country	Challenges	Needs
Sudan	• State targeting and tracking. • Surveillance. • Violence from religious groups. • Internet shutdowns. • Online visibility. • Hacking. • Stalking. • Threat of killing. • Killing. • Community violence. • Detention. • Doxxing. • Digital skills and security training. • Funding.	**Laws and Policies:** 1. "We need tighter laws and the implementing bodies to be on our side." Participant J, Sudan 2. Perpetrators of violence should be brought to justice. Sometimes the abusers are the state, which means overall structural reform is required for MWHRDs to flourish in Sudan. **Capacity Building:** MWHRDs need to keep developing people's capacities to be able to do their work effectively without feeling the pressure of being visible, especially at a time when such visibility presents threats. **Content Creation:** MWHRDs need to be trained in the language of content creation. They need to be able to use audio-visual content that speaks to their stories and cases and engages audiences. Many people are not drawn to human rights reporting because it's so dry. **Online and Physical Protection:** MWHRDs in Sudan need to be taught how to protect themselves online, how to protect their identities, and how to seek help from entities that can help them with grants to travel, for example. MWHRDs need to learn ways to protect themselves from tracking and other threats during protests and periods of unrest. **Feminist Solidarity:** MWHRDs need solidarity groups that can help fight back when a slander campaign occurs so that individual victims do not feel alone. **Mental Health:** Mental health support is also very important. **Digital tools:** MWHRDs need larger digital capacity building activities that include but go beyond digital security to include digital tools for resilience building.

Country	Challenges	Needs
South Sudan	• Islamophobia. • Religious community violence. • Moral policing. • Internet accessibility and connectivity. • Low digital skills. • State violence. • Funding. • Digital security and skills training.	**Laws and Policies:** 1. Practical policies on communication and online/digital protection and rights and strong implementation bodies. 2. Internal social and digital media policies that assist MWHRDs during online engagements. 3. The state needs to refine its definitions of "computer misuse," "indecent content," "pornography," and "publish" in its new CyberCrime and Computer Misuse Order to be more specific and adhere to freedoms of expression standards. 4. Repeal Sections 75 and 289 of the Penal Code criminalising the publication or communication of false statements prejudicial to South Sudan and criminalising defamation (Article 19, 2020). **State and Religion:** The intersections of religion and state ruling need to be separated. Civic needs should be put before traditional cultural norms that harm MWHRDs and validate oppression. **Funding:** MWHRDs require funding to support digital skills training for themselves and their colleagues. This is also important to access forms of protection when needed. **Digital Skills:** 1. MWHRDs need comprehensive digital security training that includes self-defence, i.e. how a person can defend themselves online, and how to respond to violence online. 2. MWHRDs need training on how to conduct social media campaigns while ensuring individual and organisational safety.

Country	Challenges	Needs
Somalia and Somaliland	- Threats of killing. - Digital security training. - Religion-based violence. - Doxxing. - Online harassment and bullying. - Online visibility.	**Laws and Policies:** 1. Legal protection for MWHRDs, and internet freedoms and digital protections. 2. Stricter policies and laws to protect MWHRDs working on gender-based violence and family laws. 3. Prosecution of perpetrators of violence against MWHRDs. 4. Updated laws that protect MWHRDs **Religion and State:** 1. Separation of religious bodies and the state. The state should operate independently from religious entities, and the latter should not influence state decisions. 2. A more stable government that is not constantly affected by political unrest and religious insurgents in the region so it is better able to implement the laws. **Education:** 1. Comprehensive gender studies units should be embedded within educational curricula to help people understand the importance of addressing gender inequalities, violence and oppression in our society. These forms of education should also be available to the general public, including people who do not have access to formal education. 2. Public education should be provided on human rights laws and rights to debunk misconceptions regarding MWHRDs work and their relationship with religion. **Digital Security Training:** 1. Continuous and grassroots digital training that is easy to understand and contextualised to MWHRDs' realities. 2. Practical strategies on how to protect individuals and organisations online and in person as a result of online engagement.

Country	Challenges	Needs
Tanzania	• Social media blockages. • Predatory legislature. • Online bullying and harassment. • Religious-based violence. • Digital skills. • Digital security skills.	**Laws and Policies:** 1. Overturn the clause that makes it an offence to ridicule, abuse or harm the reputation, prestige or status of the United Republic of Tanzania. 2. Repeal the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations 2020. 3. Refine Cybercrime laws to include sufficient protection for MWHRDs in the country. 4. Unblock Twitter. **Digital Education and Security Training:** 1. MWHRDs need digital education because of the increasing rate of online harassment, so they can learn how to handle and respond to these forms of threats. 2. MWHRDs could use training on how to brand and promote themselves as organisations and activists in ways that are true to the cause but more acceptable to the public. 3. MWHRDs need training on how to use digital platforms as a source of income, to help the work and to navigate financial violence. **Protection** The need for safe and friendly safe spaces that address online harassment where people can report bullies without personally facing repercussions. This could be in the form of help desks and/or emergency contacts.

Personal Digital Security Tools and Strategies

The following guiding questions may help explore effective strategies to mitigate the harms and threats WHRDs face online:

How can Muslim WHRDs securely share information and use social media?
How can they ensure that they are not being tracked while using a VPN during internet shutdowns?
How can digital security be taught and used at the grassroots level?

Securely Sharing Information Online

Anonymous Online Navigation

> *During extreme political developments, the regimes try to shut down the internet, but some people are still able to access the Internet by using landscape networks. So they are still traceable via their GPS signals. So I wonder how we can still secure our communications during those periods of time.* ***- Participant F, Uganda***

MWHRDs working in politically volatile states such as Sudan explained that their digital footprints are tracked by government agencies. During protests, many are unaware of practices that anonymize their Internet Protocol (IP) address even during internet shutdowns. Virtual private Networks (VPNs) are the commonly used tools for anonymous web-surfing. As such, this section provides some free tools that allow people to anonymously navigate digital spaces without giving locations and keeping internet interactions private (CcHub, 2018). However, appropriate training is required to utilise these tools and technologies in the safest manner possible.

Revisiting VPNs, they are the most accessible tools for WHRDs to use when by-passing censorship and can keep the user anonymous. Yet, some of the limitations of VPNs include slowing down your internet connection, draining your battery, and in many surveillance and high-censorship locations, they are illegal. On the more positive aspects, it helps protect a person's data in motion (real-time interactions between people, data, and processes), however, it is unable to protect data at rest i.e., when data is stored on a server or drive. Some free VPNs, include Lantern, RiseupVPN, Psiphon Windows, and CalyxVPN

The first digital security tool that allows private and secure browsing is TOR. TOR is a software that enables private browsing by blocking trackers and other digital surveillance tools. It also allows users to by-pass online censorship, and provides multi-layered encryption. Hence, when MWHRDs attend protests or face censorship of content or assessing parts of the internet, TOR helps circumvent these threats.

AnonymoX, is another free Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox add-on that allows secure browsing, by changing one's IP address, changing of virtual identities, secure browsing and accessing blocked sites.

Altogether, these software tools may help MWHRDs to safely use online spaces without the fear of being tracked and surveilled by state authorities.

Secure Telephone Communication and Instant Messaging

Most of the interviewees for this research shared that they mostly use WhatsApp for easy communication, and technology such as telephone calls and electronic messaging. These tools require digital safety mechanisms to ensure MWHRDs can use them safely, or need to be replaced with other tools.

A transnational organisation based in Uganda shared that Whatsapp presents various security threats, hence advised their employees to only engage in work-related conversation on Signal. Signal offers free and secure messaging, voice and video conversations through encryptions. Unlike applications such as Whatsapp and Telegram, Signal is unable to listen or read your conversations. Signal has been commended by various whistle-blowers, journalists and technologists. Just like Signal, the software SilentPhone may also help MWHRDs engage in secure voice and video calling.

> *We stopped using WhatsApp for communication, we're only using Signal for work and data communications because it was built as an encrypted space, not like Telegram or WhatsApp. We try to, for example, when sharing a password use the setting of the disappearing message which removes the message after some time. We also do not share sensitive information over emails, or in the body of the email itself and teach our staff how to encrypt their data. It is a culture that needs to be adopted.* ***- Participant F, Uganda.***

Other software that helps people secure their digital interactions include Chatsecure, an add-on that allows people to secure their instant messages, and Cyph, which can be used for photos, file transfers, as well as messages.

Through these various digital security software, MWHRDs in the GHoA would be able to securely communicate with each other and organise without the fear of their conversations being tracked or leaked by third parties. They can also maintain anonymous online identities without having to permanently limit their online engagements. This would allow them to carry out their work and leverage the affordances of technology towards achieving better outcomes for their advocacy.

Teaching Digital Security at the Grassroots Level

An OECD report on the importance of digital security highlights that part of the challenges to address digital safety is because it continues to be treated as solely a technical problem. Meanwhile, it presents both social, economic and political risks. The issue with focusing on a technical approach to digital safety is that it ignores the contexts and social constructions that make insecurity possible in the first place.

Participant E, Somalia and Participant F, Sudan explained that digital security training remains highly technical, and the skills learned are not transferable or easily retainable.

> *I engaged in a security training that only lasted for 2 days. It is new to me, and I still do not remember what I was being taught because it was a one-off event. We need something more continuous and easier to understand.* ***- Participant E Somalia.***

Similarly, a participant from Uganda also shared that digital security trainers lack the context of human right defenders. The industry being male-dominated also affects the effectiveness of digital security training for women in the global South. The participant explained that men rarely want to immerse themselves and learn the gendered social perspectives of digital safety and security, which makes lessons somewhat irrelevant and difficult for the WHRDs in GHoA to understand. Regarding the concerns raised on contextual digital security training, Participant A, Uganda, suggested that teaching women in grassroot spaces would help WHRDs who work within local communities protect themselves.

Hence, MWHRDs are unable to fully apply the lessons shared. The inaccessibility of digital security training and solutions, also include language barriers, thus supporting OECD's report on the need for a more holistic approach towards achieving digital security.

To ensure effective security training at the grassroots level, the participants shared that there is a need for consistent and continuous workshops to allow them to disseminate the information shared. These workshops should be broken down into levels where MWRHDs progressively learn the various skills needed, starting from the basics on how to use digital technologies to different forms of safety strategies. Facilitators should also have gendered, religious and locational contextual insights into the realities of MWHRDs in the GHoA, rather than a mere technical understanding of safety online. In addition, training should be simplified in languages that are translatable, which will help MWHRDs share their knowledge amongst their networks. Similarly, a contextualised training allows for easy translation because it is able to recognize the importance of culture in the way language is formed and spoken.

Finally, a sustainable form of digital security training would be to ensure that learning toolkits and resources are openly and remotely available to MWHRDs to always refer to.

Advocacy Opportunities and Best Practices for Achieving Holistic Digital Security in the GHoA Region

Regional Legislature and Accountability Bodies

Many MWHRDs are unable to imagine a safe digital environment without a safe offline space. Also the political and social climates in their location make it extremely difficult to envision a future where protective legislature is effectively implemented, with effective checks and balances. However, East Africa and GHoA blocs and organisations could learn from ECOWAS' (Economic Community of West African States) interference in the Gambia. In 2016, after the former president of Gambia refused to step down after losing an election, ECOWAS mediators intervened to hold the former president accountable to the regional democratic standards. Their actions prevented potential post-election violence and a dictatorship (AlJazeera,2017). With regards to digital security, the GHoA requires a strong accountability body that ensures that all states adhere to data protection and freedom of expression laws and policies. Countries within the region also need to ratify and follow the 2017 Cotonou Declaration on strengthening and expanding the protection of all Human Rights Defenders in Africa, in addition to the Maputo Protocol.

Nations in the GHoA need to repeal internet and communication laws that are used to target and stifle the freedoms of WHRDs. Notably, in 2020 Uganda nullified a "flawed 'cyber-harassment' sentence under Section 24 of the Computer Misuse Act 2011" (Article 19, 2020).

Separate the State and Religion

When religious institutions dictate state affairs, civil rights become marred in religious beliefs and doctrines. For instance, MWHRDs challenging family laws face oppression from their community, religious institutions and the state, and are unable to differentiate between the latter. States then become the implementers of discriminatory laws and use religion to validate the laws and other violence against women and MWHRDs, thus making it difficult for people to advocate for systems outside of religious laws. This makes separation of state and religion important to achieving some form of egalitarian and progressive structures and freedoms.

> *Address the gendered religious and cultural beliefs that dehumanise women and do not provide them with equal access to their family's property.*
> ***- Participant A, Uganda.***

For example, in Rwanda, religion was linked to be one of the causes of the genocide against the Tutsis (Haworth,2018). As such, part of the country's successful rebuilding and development strategy was to eliminate religious interference on state matters, and to an extent cultural development. The separation was a necessary step towards reconciliation, strong national unity and governance systems.

MWHRDs who engaged in this research expressed their concern about the power of religious and traditional institutions in their countries. Islamic states usually rely on interpretations of Shari'a and other Islamic jurisprudence to govern communities. If there is one common rule across religious doctrines and ideologies, it is that all rules and laws are set and do not provide room for questioning. Meanwhile the core of MWHRDs' work is addressing gendered religious violence, which puts them in danger online and offline.

Along these lines, the first step towards achieving a holistic digital security in the GHoA presents advocacy opportunities that require legislative and policy-oriented change, and demand for more accountability within the region. In addition, the power of the religious state needs to be dismantled, through both active and subtle resistance strategies.

Finally, MWHRDs require transnational support and solidarity with broader feminisms to address security threats and harms through funding, knowledge sharing, safety and advocacy. Solidarity with other MWHRDs in Africa, and around the world would enable MWHRDs in the GHoA to learn more innovative ways to sustain movements, explore other forms of counterpublics (online and offline), and build safe spaces.

Opportunities

> *The government could not initially track people, but now they are able to do that due to improved technology. So they are able to tell what is going to happen, which is threatening to MWHRDs.* ***- Participant F, Uganda***

First, the state's forecasting technique presents an opportunity for MWHRDs to be able to also have the right skills and tools that allow them to identify potential threats beforehand. This would help them proactively protect themselves, and employ innovative and strategic means to carry out their work. Some of these tools may be created through technology, while others could be social and strategic design making skills that address offline forms of surveillance and violence as a result of it.

Second, MWHRDs who work within networks and assist other activists would benefit from a comprehensive training on safe ways to report violations, seek protection for themselves and survivors of violence from the public, media and the state. This is also an opportunity for emergency toolkits and help desks dedicated to MWHRDs in the GHoA. These toolkits could include readily available guidelines on how to respond to the different levels and types of threats; access to emergency housing and funds amongst others.

Engaging online through messaging, emails and documents leaves MWHRDs susceptible to hacking, tracking, leaking sensitive information, and so on. There is an opportunity to investigate ways people can encrypt their online documents and safely share information with communities of people. In relation to the Sudanese participants' suggestion on "building the capacity of activists within their contexts," there may be an opportunity to explore alternative accessible online spaces that can host communities in a very secure and less known way than mainstream social platforms.

Third, intergenerational dialogue, engagement and awareness creation with communities and civil society would help MWHRDs address the knowledge gap and conflicting ideologies that exist between them and the key stakeholders. WHRDs often work closely with communities, and recognise the need to collaborate with multiple stakeholders, in this line, Participant A, Uganda highlighted: *"When we talk about emancipation of women, we also need to change the perceptions of community stakeholders to fully achieve our goal"*. Involving key community leaders to understand the impact of potential harms that MWHRDs face and having them at tables of discussions as key change agents helps MWHRDs point out the necessity to support their work.

Finally, content creation and advocacy remain significant in the work of MWHRDs. It allows them to tell their stories, and bring light to the experiences of people within their communities. This research identified a skill gap in the use of different social media platforms. For example, Twitter and Instagram both provide multiple yet distinctive affordances for different groups of people. Their interfaces and design also influence the way people respond and interact with content. Twitter for example is considered to be one of the biggest threats to predatory and totalitarian states, yet spaces such as TikTok and Instagram are not always seen in this light. Identifying these advantages and disadvantages provides an avenue for MWHRDs to learn how to use the different platforms to their advantage, and to understand the language and ecosystems that come to govern content creation and engagement within each of these spaces. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for private technology companies to put in more funding, research and development efforts towards creating platforms that protect MWHRDs and promote the thriving of safe digital communities. This includes providing resources in local languages, localising content and improving usability, especially as it relates to safety, and lastly, improving content moderation in minority languages. This also includes focusing on progressive and inclusive technology policy that prioritises the needs of marginalised communities.

Conclusion

This research sought to explore and understand the threats that Muslim women human rights defenders (MWHRDs) in the Greater Horn of Africa region face and to develop actionable recommendations to both protect these MWHRDs as well as to create safer online communities in the quest for progressive changes to some of the challenges faced within patriarchal structures.

MWHRDs face a number of challenges in online spaces, including online violence, doxxing, sexual violence, threats of physical assault, intimidation, tracking and surveillance. The aggressors of this violence aim to silence and derail the work of MWHRDs by distracting from their work and by sowing fear both to the activists and their beneficiaries. As such, many MWHRDs choose to be anonymous or reduce their visibility, self-censor or eventually refrain from activism.

Digital platforms provide opportunities for MWHRDs to spread their message, garner support, and provide accountability and evidence. Due to a prevailing gender digital divide, high costs of internet access and devices, and low levels of digital skills training, many MWHRDs do not have access to digital platforms and do not participate in the digital commons. While this may serve as a self-protection mechanism, it also means that many women and other marginalised beneficiaries may not be able to reap the benefits of these movements due to location, language and accessibility barriers.

Technology provides a space for counterarguments and counterpublics. Furthermore, technology can create a safe space for communities when developed in a safe and inclusive manner. Technology companies still have a long way to go in creating safety and inclusivity on online platforms. In the meantime, many WHRDs must fend for themselves. This means that we need an increased investment by private companies, educational institutions, civil societies and governments in digital safety training that take into account the localised needs and contexts of MWHRDs in the GHoA.

This research is one of the first glimpses into the digital safety landscape of Muslim Women Human Rights Defenders living and working within the African context. We hope that it may serve as a starting point for more research, more funding and more discourse that explores the intersection of religion, gender and technology.

References

9 ways the Maputo Protocol has protected and promoted the rights of women and girls across Africa. (2021, October 30). Equality Now.
https://www.equalitynow.org/news_and_insights/9_ways_maputo_protocol/

Abu-Lughod, L. (2015). Do Muslim Women Need Saving? (Reprint ed.). Harvard University Press.

Access Now. (2020). Hate-Speech-and-Disinformation-Prevention-and-Suppression-Proclamation. https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2020/05/Hate-Speech-and-Disinformation-Prevention-and-Suppression-Proclamation.pdf

Ahmed, K. (2019). Scared, worried and hopeful: A Sudanese photographer's view of the uprising. Middle East Eye. https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/scared-worried-and-hopeful-sudanese-photographers-view-uprising

Al Jazeera. (2017, January 1). Yahya Jammeh calls ECOWAS deployment 'an act of war.' News | Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/1/1/yahya-jammeh-calls-ecowas-deployment-an-act-of-war

Article 19, (2012, April 5). East and Horn of Africa: Free expression and law in 2011.
https://www.refworld.org/docid/4fa792f72.html

Article 19. (2020). Freedom of Expression and the Digital Environment in Eastern Africa.
https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Freedom-of-Expression-and-the-Digital-Environment-in-Eastern-Africa.pdf

Au, L., & Liu, W. (2021, November 30). China's queer internet is being erased. Rest of World. https://restofworld.org/2021/chinas-queer-internet-is-being-erased/

AWID, (2021, May 24). New Brief: Where Is The Money for Feminist Organizing?
https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/new-brief-where-money-feminist-organizing

Badran M. (1999). Toward Islamic Feminism: A Look at the Middle East, in Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female "Public" Space in Islamic/Ate Societies, ed. Asma Afsaruddin. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 159–88: 165.

Boxell, L., & Steinert-Threlkeld, Z. (2021). Taxing dissent: The impact of a social media tax in Uganda. SSRN 3766440.

CcHUB. (2018, March 13). An Overview of Digital Security | : Digital Security Guide | Safeonline.Ng. https://safeonline.ng/fundamentals/an-overview-of-digital-security-the-need-and-dangers/

Chella, J. (2021, January 4). A Review of the Malabo Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights – Part I: Jurisdiction over International Crimes – Jessie Chella – ILA Reporter. https://ilareporter.org.au/2021/01/a-review-of-the-malabo-protocol-on-the-statute-of-the-african-court-of-justice-and-human-rights-part-i-jurisdiction-over-international-crimes-jessie-chella/

CIVICUS, (2011, March) Report on the Challenges Faced by Women In Civil Society In Africa; World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Coalition Against Online Violence. (2021, July 26). Resources. https://onlineviolenceresponsehub.org/resources

Dahir, A. L. (2019, December 2). Almaas Elman, Somali-Canadian Activist, Is Shot Dead in Mogadishu. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/world/africa/almaas-elman-somalia.html

Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com). (2020). Tanzania restricts social media during election. DW.COM. https://www.dw.com/en/tanzania-restricts-social-media-during-election/a-55433057

Dosekun, S. (2021). African Feminisms. The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies, 47–63. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_58

Eastern Africa. (2020, June 9). ARTICLE 19. https://www.article19.org/regional-office/eastern-africa/

Editorial. (2020, August 28). Somalia internet blackout after parliament votes to remove prime minister. NetBlocks. https://netblocks.org/reports/somalia-internet-blackout-after-parliament-votes-to-remove-prime-minister-DA3lx6BW

Edwin, S. (2016). Privately empowered: Expressing feminism in Islam in Northern Nigerian Fiction. Chicago: Northwestern University Press

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. (2021). Ethiopia: Internet & telecommunications shutdowns in Tigray conflict continue; human rights organisations call on all parties to cease attempts to censor population. https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/ethiopia-internet-telecommunications-shutdowns-in-tigray-conflict-continue-human-rights-organisations-call-on-all-parties-to-cease-attempts-to-censor-population/

FIRN Project, (2019, May 1) Understanding low Internet penetration rates and high gender disparity in internet access and use in Rwanda. https://researchictafrica.net/project/understanding-low-internet-penetration-rates-and-high-gender-disparity-in-internet-access-and-use-in-rwanda/

FP Editors. (2021, December 28). Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict, From Five Angles in 2021. Foreign Policy. https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/27/ethiopia-tigray-conflict-civil-war-2021/

Freedom House, (2018, November 1). Freedom on the Net 2018 - Ethiopia.
https://www.refworld.org/docid/5be16b1a4.html

Friedman, U. (2019, July 25). The Egyptian revolution dominated Twitter this year. Foreign Policy.
https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/05/the-egyptian-revolution-dominated-twitter-this-year/

Gagliardone, I., & Stremlau, N. (2011, December). Digital media, conflict and diasporas in the Horn of Africa. New York: Open Society Foundations. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OSF-Media-Report-Handbook-Digital%20Media%20Conflict%20and%20Diaspora%20in%20the%20Horn%20of%20Africa-02-20-2012-final-WEB.pdf

Gqola, P. D. (2021b). The Genesis of An Idea. In Female Fear Factory (1st ed., pp. 22–26). Melinda Ferguson books.

Graham-Harrison, E. (2021, May 9). UN catalogues 'chilling tide of abuse' against female journalists. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/may/02/un-catalogues-chilling-tide-of-abuse-against-female-journalists

Hamad, K. (2021, December 23). Sudan's Bad Laws, Internet Censorship and Repressed Civil Liberties.
https://cipesa.org/2021/12/sudans-bad-laws-internet-censorship-and-repressed-civil-liberties/

Haworth, M. T. (2018). Church and State in Rwanda: Catholic Missiology and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi. Independent Study Project.

Hooks, b. (1991) Theory as Liberatory Practice. Yale Journal of Law & Feminism, Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 2

ISHR, (2021, December 6). End attacks on Sudanese women protestors and WHRDs.
https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/end-attacks-on-sudanese-women-protestors-and-whrds/

Iyer, N., Nyamwire, B., and Nabulega, S. (2020). Alternate Realities, Alternate Internets: African Feminist Research for a Feminist Internet. Policy. https://ogbv.pollicy.org/report.pdf

Karombo, T. (2020, October 12). Lesotho, Uganda, Tanzania introduce social media rules. Quartz.
https://qz.com/africa/1915941/lesotho-uganda-tanzania-introduce-social-media-rules/

Kester, J., & Schneier, J. (2021, December 10). Soft Surveillance: Social Media Filter Bubbles as an Invitation to Critical Digital Literacies /. Https://Jitp.Commons.Gc.Cuny.Edu/. https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/soft-surveillance-social-media-filter-bubbles-as-an-invitation-to-critical-digital-literacies/

Lorde, A. (2007). The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House. In Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (Reprint ed., p. 110). Crossing Press.

Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Patriarchy in Transition: Women and the Changing Family in the Middle East. Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 35(2), 137–162. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41603930

Möller, L. M. (2015). An Enduring Relic: Family Law Reform and the Inflexibility of Wilāya. American Journal of Comparative Law, 63(4), 893–925. https://doi.org/10.5131/ajcl.2015.0027

Musawah. (2020). MAKING THE CASE FOR REFORM OF MUSLIM FAMILY LAWS. https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Policy-Brief-1-Why-Muslim-Family-Law-Reform.pdf

Mwesigwa, D. (2021). Uganda abandons social media tax but slaps new levy on internet data. Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA). https://cipesa.org/2021/07/uganda-abandons-social-media-tax-but-slaps-new-levy-on-internet data/#:~:text=Introduced%20on%20July%201%2C%202018,Facebook%2C%20Twitter%2C%20and%20WhatsApp.&text=In%20the%20second%20year%2C%20the,a%20paltry%20USD%2016.3%20million

OHCHR | Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. (n.d.). Ohchr.Org. https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/srhrdefenders/pages/declaration.aspx

Okech, A. (2021). Feminist Digital Counterpublics: Challenging Femicide in Kenya and South Africa. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 46(4), 1013–1033. https://doi.org/10.1086/713299

Olufemi, L. (2020). Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power (Outspoken by Pluto). Pluto Press.

Otto, A. I. (2021, February 11). Social media shutdown: Online businesses count losses. Daily Monitor https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/social-media-shutdown-online businesses-count-lossess-3287348

Pollicy.org, Kakande, A., Achieng, G., Iyer, N., Nyamwire, B., Nabulega, S., & Mwendwa., I. (2021). Amplified Abuse Understanding Violence against Women in Politics and Leadership: A study on the 2021 Uganda General Elections. Pollicy.org. https://vawp.pollicy.org/

Puar, J. K. (2012). Project MUSE - “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess”: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory. Https://Muse.Jhu.Edu/. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/486621

Reuters. (2021, August 30). Internet disrupted, streets quiet in South Sudan after call for protests. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/internet-disrupted-streets-quiet-south-sudan-after-call-protests-2021-08-30/

Rothschild, C. (2021). No turning back: Women human rights defenders remain steadfast in perilous times. OpenDemocracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/-no-turning-back-women-human-rights-defenders-remain-steadfast-in-perilous-times/

Sackur, L. (2021, August 26). Why feminist solidarity with Afghanistan is about more than women and girls. Gal-Dem. https://gal-dem.com/afghanistan-women-girls-feminist-solidarity/;

Saine, C. (2021, July 22). Journalists Say They Feel Constantly Watched After Pegasus Spyware Revelations. VOA https://www.voanews.com/a/silicon-valley-technology_journalists-say-they-feel-constantly-watched-after-pegasus-spyware/6208552.html

Salami, M. (2021, October 6). A Feminist Analysis of the Soul. - [Perspectiva]. https://systems-souls-society.com/a-feminist-analysis-of-the-soul/#:%7E:text=If% 20the%20soul%20exists%20in,a%20tool%20for%20setting%20free.

Salman, A. (2021). Queer on the Internet: The Politics of Visibility. GenderIT.Org.
https://genderit.org/feminist-talk/queer-internet-politics-visibility

Sanusi, K. Y. (2021, July 21). Between Feminism and Islam My Personal Journey from 'Muslim Feminist' to 'Muslimah.' The Republic.
https://republic.com.ng/february-march-2020/between-feminsim-and-islam-feminist/

Seedat, F. (2013). When Islam and Feminism Converge. The Muslim World, 103(3), 404–420. https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12022

Seedat, F. (2021). South African Feminists in Search of the Sacred. In Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa (p. 90). Wits Press.

Shaikh, S. (2009). In Search of al-Insan: Sufism, Islamic Law, and Gender. Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 77(4), 781–822. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfp052

Shari'a acts as codes for living that all Muslims should adhere to, including prayers, fasting and donations to the poor etc.

Siha. (2020). Our Story. Sihanet.Org. https://sihanet.org/our-story/

Skok, A. (2021, December 1). Internet shutdowns and blockings continue to hide atrocities of military coup in Sudan. Access Now. https://www.accessnow.org/update-internet-shutdown-sudan/

Sudanese Women on the Front Lines of Resistance. (2021). Sihanet.Org.
https://sihanet.org/sudanese-women-on-the-front-lines-of-the-resistance/

SUDANESE WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE RESISTANCE. (2021). Sihanet.Org.
https://sihanet.org/sudanese-women-on-the-front-lines-of-the-resistance/

Tarawnah, N., (2020, March 5). Sextortion, harassment, and deepfakes: How digital weapons are being used to silence women. IFEX. https://ifex.org/sextortion-harassment-and-deepfakes-how-digital-weapons-are-being-used-to-silence-women/

Taye, B. (2020, July 16). Back in the dark: Ethiopia shuts down internet once again. Access Now. https://www.accessnow.org/back-in-the-dark-ethiopia-shuts-down-internet-once-again/

Tufekci, Z. (2018). Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest (Reprint ed.). Yale University Press.

Uganda 2021 general elections: The internet shutdown and its ripple effects | Association for Progressive Communications. (2021). Apc.Org. https://www.apc.org/en/news/uganda-2021-general-elections-internet-shutdown-and-its-ripple-effects

Unesco. (2021). The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/the-chilling.pdf

United Nations. (1998). Declaration on human rights defenders. https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-human-rights-defenders/declaration-human-rights-defenders

Vigliar, V. (2021, May 10). How are threats to human rights defenders gendered? Cejil. https://cejil.org/en/blog/how-are-threats-to-human-rights-defenders-gendered/

Wadud, A. (2006). Inside The Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam (Islam in the Twenty-First Century) (59543rd ed.). Oneworld Publications.

We Stand With You – A statement of solidarity with women, girls and other populations at risk due to the ongoing conflict in
Ethiopia. (2021). Sihanet.Org. https://sihanet.org/we-stand-with-you-a-statement-of-solidarity-with-women-girls-and-other-populations-at-risk-due-to-the-ongoing-conflict-in-ethiopia/

Women Human Rights Defenders. (2019, March 5). AWID. https://www.awid.org/special-focus-sections/women-human-rights-defenders

Woollacott, E. (2021, November 4). Human rights activists condemn mass denial of service as Sudan's nationwide internet shutdown enters second week. The Daily Swig. https://portswigger.net/daily-swig/human-rights-activists-condemn-mass-denial-of-service-as-sudans-nation wide-internet-shutdown-enters-second-week