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ملاحظات بحثية (Research Notes)

ميشيل جلفند

الاطار المفهومي لنخبة القوة الرأسمالية: مقارنة سوسيو- سياسية

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معالم ميثاق آفاق جديدة في علم الاجتماع الثقافي

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المساندة الاجتماعية وبرامجها في المجتمع المصري:

دراسة تحليلية لبرنامج تكافل وكرامة

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الإساءة الجنسية من قبل القائمين بالرعاية الصحية تجاه المريضات

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citizen journalists and writing about social and political protest, women become media activists and undercut the communication power and control of the state” (2020: 232). Because these new forms of activism are still in the making, the authors cannot end the chapter in a certain tone; they leave the door ajar to ascertain the new media activism’s effectiveness. Indeed,

However, it remains to be seen if the domestic links and coalitions within which women activists participate can undermine existing patriarchal structures and bring about the more open, democratic, and egalitarian societies to which the region’s feminists have long aspired (2020: 232).

The book winds up with Rayan and Rizzo’s statement that “Rethinking Gender in the Contemporary Middle East and North Africa” is never complete “without recognizing its intersections with religious status, social class, age, sexualities, race, ethnicity, language, and family status” (2020: 235). The chapters have employed this theoretical framework to read all aspects of Gender in the MENA region, with an acute awareness of the concept of neopatriarchy that has replaced classic patriarchy. Neopatriarchy not only highlights modernity and globalization at large but also reveals the pivotal role of the State. As I see it, rethinking Gender in the MENA region requires a rigorous analysis of the rising new generations- whose consciousness was formed in 2011- who are changing the reality of Gender by carving new spaces- virtual or public- that are totally overlooked by power. These spaces are filled with new subjectivities that are adamantly anti-policies and anti-institution and new forms of knowledge production. But perhaps that needs another project. So far, the book has achieved its purpose in addressing the target readers, and the wish of the editors is granted:

We also hope that we have provided important insights on social change in the MENA region based on an intersectional perspective from diverse societies for undergraduate and graduate students and the interested lay reader. We hope this work will provide a solid foundation for those who will do further in-depth research on the ever-changing dynamics of gender in the contemporary Middle East and North Africa (2020: 238).

cultural changes with multiple different examples clarifies not only how the Arab Spring has affected women's activism in the region but also why Western scholars have overlooked these movements. At the end of the chapter, the authors state that further research is needed to highlight "the commonalities in the way women mobilize across the region and in other repressive environments" (2020: 212). The final statement of the chapter indeed highlights the areas that require more research and are worthy of attention:

In response to a new recognition of "no movements" and the ways women challenge legal barriers and cultural norms through their daily activities, research is needed that focuses on the new forms that women's movements in the Middle East and North Africa are taking (such as the increased mobilization in virtual spaces) and the meanings that Middle Eastern women give to their actions (2020: 212).

The response to these questions is partly provided in chapter twelve, where Elham Gheytauchi and Valentine M. Moghadam explore "The New Media Activism." The novelty of this form of activism is attributed to the rise of information and communication technologies (ICTs) which played a pivotal role in the social uprisings in the region. It is a form that allows women to mobilize online and offline, it provides new virtual spaces for non-organized women (hence, the rise of new activists), and it leads to the formation of networks. The authors focus on four country cases: Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. The comparison renders media activism and citizen journalism as rising forms of activism in the region that entail opportunities and risks, especially state repression and policing. I tend to conclude this chapter to be the book's finale; somehow, it interweaves all the aspects explored so far in three propositions. The first is "women's struggles for civil, political, and social rights are now part of the series of factors that led to the mass social upheavals in the MENA—and continue to do so." Second, "women as citizen journalists have been changing the way that issues are framed as well as helping to alter the political opportunity structure"; and third, "by becoming



highlighting all forms of abuses MDWs suffer from is the concept of remittance, financial and social. While financial remittance (unidirectional) tends to change gender power relations, social remittance induces culture's reinvention. Parrs concludes that:

Domestic workers and female refugees exemplify how women tend to reinvent their identity in migration, forced or not, and use creativity and resilience. We are currently observing significant changes, constant dance partners with traditions' recrudescence, and deeply anchored mechanisms to stop the changes. However, all of them tend to dance together and oscillate between social transformation and return to more rigid traditional practices (2020: 189).

Towards the end of the book, social transformation and new visions are foregrounded as the new markers of gender identity and subjectivity formation in the MENA region. In chapter eleven, Anne M. Price and Chelsea Marty address one of the most critical consequences of all the 2010-2011 protests: "Gender and Social Movements." The authors survey the most relevant views in social movements literature, where the latter has become part of political sociology. One of the leitmotifs in this survey is the critique of how social activities in the MENA region have been studied. Mostly, the comparative lens is rare, if not absent, whereas exceptionalism and particularism are the norms. Against this critique's backdrop, the chapter explores women's social movements in the region from 2009 (the Green protests in Iran). The research questions engaged with are pertinent and fitting for a quasi-recap of the status of Gender in the region: "What are the targets of contemporary women's movements in the Middle East and North Africa? How have the Arab Spring uprisings affected women's activism and their ability to successfully mobilize to achieve their goals in the Middle East and North Africa? For what reasons have women's movements in the Middle East and North Africa been historically overlooked?" (2020: 195). The focus on non-movement (based on Asef Bayat's concept), online organizing, and legal and

out their limitations and the approach of women in development (WID). On the other hand, the author takes the national mechanisms for growth as the mirror, reflecting all obstacles (and opportunities) to achieving gender equality. The most significant barriers are political instability, the rise of authoritarianism and conservatism, occupation, conflicts, war on terror, and weak economies. She admits that from the 1990s, neoliberalism has encouraged the rise of NGOs, which “proved somewhat effective in raising people’s and politicians’ consciousness of gender equality issues, but they showed little ability to form a “hegemonic bloc” in civil society” (2020: 161). This chapter’s strength springs from the careful and thorough contextualization of every country Jad deals with, and still, she makes it clear that there are common rubrics. She drives her point home by saying:

All of these examples illustrate the importance of context for the degree to which national mechanisms operate. Examination of context must include political will, national resources, human capacity, organization, and strength of women’s movements, in addition to the general status of women (education, health, legislation, work, and political participation). Whether the State is involved in some form of conflict is another vital factor influencing whether it will pursue gender equality and women’s rights. Countries engaged in wars and other competitions are typically characterized by low or stagnant economic growth, political instability, and the regression of almost all achieved gains for women (in health, education, employment, and legal and political rights) (UNDP 2003, 2004, 2006). (2020: 164).

In chapter ten, Alexandra Parrs examines one of the most influential factors when seen from a gender perspective, i.e., “Gender and Migration.” Mobility has become a tenet of the 21st Century. What makes the issue more vibrant is the rise of female migration, mainly migrant domestic workers (MDW). Parrs reads migration within, from, and to the MENA region and analyses how this noticeable mobility has changed gender relations, families’ internal structures, and traditional gender roles. Yet, what is also of importance in this chapter and



in chapter eight. The author reads, “The various ways women’s full citizenship is diminished by their sex” (2020: 131), with a particular focus on civil, social, and political rights. The chapter proceeds with clear-cut subtitles about women’s citizenship in the region, highlighting the importance of the family as the basic unit of society and references to almost every right, including the legal right to protect the body’s integrity. A statement like the following: “If women step out of this contract and assert individual rights that come into conflict with their role in the kin contract or patriarchal bargain, they risk foregoing the nurturance and protection that kin provides” does not take into consideration the new phenomenon in the region where young women choose to leave their families and live independently.

Additionally, the class factor is crucial in any analysis of the relation between women and the family. What could be misleading, unintentionally, in this study overlooks two hypotheses: the intersectionality of Gender and the specific socio-political and legal context of every country. Although the author explores significant changes to civil and penal codes since 2000 in Morocco and Turkey, the rest of the region seems to be thrown in one basket. For example, when the author says, “In the Middle East and North Africa, social benefits are typically channeled through men as heads of households (except Israel)” (2020: 149), the number of women who provide for their families while the men are unemployed are glossed over. The changes that have taken place in the laws of guardianship and freedom to travel cannot be overlooked. And, if Hisham Sharabi’s book *Neopatriarchy* (1988) is to be read in 2020, one must give credit to the young generations whose radical discursive practices are changing the region, slowly but surely.

In chapter nine, “Gender and Development,” *Islah Jad* centralizes context, making the chapter an eye-opener. Contrary to all prevalent opinions, *Jad* acknowledges the privileges of state feminism, which appeared under developmental states’ umbrella (post-independence eras). Yet, she also points

new consciousness, decided to carve new spaces other than those allowed by the State. Hence, political activism and activism. The author then highlights two activism strategies: anti-sexual harassment campaigns in Egypt and street theatre performances in Tunisia. Although in both countries “feminists remain constrained by patriarchal political agendas and at risk of being instrumentalized to serve the interests of the state elites and oppositional actors,” they, nonetheless, “are attempting to combat these challenges” (2020: 118). While the anti-sexual harassment campaigns in Egypt have alerted many scholars to the rise of a new form of activism, activism in Tunisia did not receive the same attention. Street theatre performances in Tunisia, with a focus on...., engage the bystanders in controversial debates. This exciting technique is reminiscent of the Syrian playwright Sa’dallah Wannus’ theatre, where he called for theatre politicization. These two forms of activism prove that “we are witnessing the emergence of a new generation of activists and thinkers who are in many respects wiser to the trappings of patriarchal and authoritarian bargains and to the ways that multiple identities mediate citizenship (intersectionality)” (2020: 118).

The concluding part in the previous chapter is of fundamental importance since it is the vision that seems most politically correct now:

While these two cases certainly cannot fully encapsulate all that is going on in terms of political activism since the uprisings, their work embodies some of the more complex enactments of citizenship that continue to be practiced throughout the region despite the reassertion of authoritarian forms of politics as usual. In the development of such new subjectivities, so many analysts of politics in the Arab region hold out hope for a more fundamental sociopolitical transformation in the long term (2020: 128).

These are new subjectivities that reject the old patriarchy, classic patriarchy entirely in Moghadam’s words, carve new creative spaces to practice agency, and acquire new citizenships. While precarity is becoming a global issue, Stephanie E. Nanes limits it to the MENA region through reading “Gender and Citizenship”



violates women's bodies, J. Michael Ryan calls it a practice. He declares, "I neither attempt to defend nor condemn the practice of female circumcision. Instead, my goal is to present a critical analysis of the practice citing both sides of the debate (in fact, the discussion is quite a bit more nuanced than simply for or against) (2020: 94-95). One wonders how in the 21st Century, there is difficult to condemn female genital mutilation (a term that Ryan discards, which promotes cultural relativism). On the other side, while with all good intentions, Ryan is bent on severing the link between Islam and female genital mutilation, he could have centralized the factor of culture. In Egypt, for example, both Muslims and Copts promote the practice. Although the author states that he is neither defending nor condemning, his position remains questionable. In the last part of the chapter, he surveys all attempts to eradicate FGM and contemplates alternative approaches. One cannot but read between the lines that the author is opposed to such a humiliating practice. Certainly, Ryan is correct in saying that men do not impose FGM on women. It is women who encourage the practice only to reproduce all patriarchal norms. Eradicating the practice has a long way to go, and this needs a rigorous activation and implementation of the law.

While debates on circumcision intensify the critical problematic body politics, Michaëlle Browers explores another area of politics. Although chapter seven is entitled "Gender and Politics," it does not offer the traditional analysis that depends on statistics that attempt to see women's position about decision making (reminiscent of the Beijing UN Conference held in 1995). The chapter instead surveys the work of State feminism in the region since the post-independence 'revolutionary' governments, which succeeded in bringing about many changes. Yet, this never meant the increase of supporting gender equality. On the contrary, such governments survived easily with a gender paradox. That is, democracy and advocacy for women's rights did not necessarily go together; naturally, excluding women from public space continued to be the norm. That is why the uprisings in the MENA region stand as a turning point where new generations, with a

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a problem that crosscuts borders, culture, religion, Gender, sexuality, class, and age. It is not unique to or absent from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), through its prevalence varies by context. The taboo, shame, and victim-blaming behavior associated with SGBV serve to silence people and prohibit a better understanding of how ubiquitous the problem is and how it is variously expressed across contexts (2020: 73).

What gives strength to this chapter is the literature review that does not marginalize scholarship from the South. On the other hand, the author condemns the practice of resorting to the specificity of culture to justify violence. She states that “culture has become a battleground, so to speak, in the global to local struggle over women’s rights and in challenges to universalist notions of rights as encoded in various quasi-legal transnational instruments, such as CEDAW and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (2020: 85). The author does not blame patriarchy as an abstract term, but instead borrows from Valentine Moghadam the handy phrase, “the belt of classic patriarchy” (2020: 80) to explain the logic that makes men entitled to practicing violence. Because this notion is also what constitutes the State’s mind, violence against women in the private sphere goes unnoticed.

This gendering of the private sphere and the position of the home as outside the reach of the State, regulated only by families that vigorously defend its sanctity (and, therefore, the sanctity of women’s bodies), leaves women vulnerable to and with little protection from intrafamilial violence (2020: 83).

Yet, the author also explores the forms and effects of violence against and perpetrated by men. This approach’s novelty echoes the project of exploring masculinities conducted by Shereen El Feki and Gary Barker in chapter two. Violence against LGBTs also occupies a central place in this chapter; no research about violence can miss that.

While Abdelmonem considers circumcision to be a form of violence that



and in civil society” (2020:35). Yet, daily life politics prove that neither men nor women adhere to the State’s discourse. The silent majority retaliate by deviating from the State’s route, and this is how they adapt to the challenging economic circumstances. This majority is aware that the State has withdrawn from its role, and they have been left alone to face the austerity measures imposed by the World Bank and IMF. Religion, in daily life, comes next to bread. On another note, the debates about religion and laws are almost limited to scholars and intellectuals; these are not famous debates.

“Marriage and Divorce” is the title of chapter four, where Nadia Sonneveld reads the importance of marriage in the MENA region in all its forms and complexities. Against the backdrop of the economist Gary Becker’s theory of the gain from marriage, which is not limited to material increases, the author attempts to read the religious, social, and legal understandings of marriage and divorce in the region. Becker’s theoretical framework did not return valid results. The author does not see any gain from marriage in the area due to declining fertility rates, women’s access to divorce, and women’s participation in the labor market. Analysis overlooked a crucial increase that might come out of marriage: love and company. The politics of effect are central in marriage since any intimate relations out of wedlock are complex and risky.

On the other hand, the author examines alternative forms of marriage in the region and highlights the importance of marriage registration, an act employed by the State to control its citizens, according to the author. What is not highlighted is that registering marriage endows children with the legal right to carry their father’s name and allows them to inherit from her husband. Registration is legal protection. Discussing marriage and divorce from several perspectives cannot yield any fruitful results without centralizing the factor of class. Yet, this does not seem to be an axis on which the analysis rests.

In Chapter five, Angie Abdelmonem writes about Sexual and Gender-based Violence. Right at the outset, she made it clear that:

studies. The study explores “how men in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine see their lives at work and at home—as husbands, fathers, and sons—and the changing work around them” (2020:14). The literature review reveals that this is a rather relatively new field, and it cites all previous relevant scholarship meticulously. Yet, one of the essential publications about the subject is unfortunately absent. *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* that came out in 2006 and is edited by Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, was an eye-opener and must be given credit. Considering the innovative findings and firsthand accounts this project presents, a book’s absence is just a minor blunder. The results reveal that even though there is a demise of classical masculinity, neither women nor men are satisfied. The authors declare that:

It is clear from the findings of IMAGES MENA and other research in the region that manhood’s old models are increasingly thrown into question. Many men lament what they see as the decline and fall of their domestic authority and their weakened status as financial providers. At the same time, some women question whether gender-equitable laws and policies can make a difference in their daily lives and whether that difference is necessary for the better (2020:28).

The State also has its masculinity (and patriarchy), which reveals itself partly in administering religion about Gender. In Chapter three, Amna Zarrugh writes about “Gender and Religion,” where she thoroughly analyses the State’s role in imposing religious rules on the laws. In other words, faith is mediated by the State, and this appears most in women’s status since they are the cultural markers of society. Because religion cannot be summarized in a single word- religion- the chapter engages with a broad scope of issues that reflect the relation between Gender and religion. The author states that she addresses “the politics of Islam and gender in greater detail as many of the key debates and social movements operating in the region have focused on the place of Islam in guiding state policy



Discarding all perspectives that render the MENA region a static and fixed entity endows this book with a unique position in scholarship about Gender in the area. In the introduction, the editors put it very clearly that:

....using Gender as a framing analysis can be misleading as no single demographic should be considered without an intersectional perspective. One must consider not only Gender but also race, class, sexuality, religion, geography, family status, age, able-bodiedness, and a variety of other factors in tandem to find any meaningful answers. Thus, while chapters in this volume foreground gender, none does so at the expense of considering different vital demographics.

The intersectional perspectives through which all aspects of Gender are analyzed in the eleven chapters achieve many critical objectives. First, Gender is situated within the complex web of socio-political factors; second, the formation of gendered subjectivities is read against the backdrop of judicial, legal, and economic policies; and third, the intersectional reading of Gender ascertains that any scholarship that reads Gender in a political vacuum renders a false picture of the socio-cultural paradigm. Therefore, I am in complete agreement with the editors that Gender is “how many are shaped to see the world and how they come to be seen in the world. It is, in short, one of the fundamental notions of how we live our lives, organize our societies, and exist in the world today” (2020: 2). While the rise of neoliberal policies is not emphasized in the introduction, the subsequent chapters indirectly highlight this calamity, especially the parts that deal with marriage and divorce.

Contrary to all expectations, the first chapter after the introduction is not a survey of women’s status in the MENA region nor a history of the women’s movement. Instead, it is about masculinities. In “Men, Masculinities, and Gender Relations,” Shereen El Feki and Gary Barker present a project conducted under the umbrella of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey, Middle East and North Africa (IMAGES MENA). The survey and its accompanying qualitative research can compete in the field as one of the most extensive groundbreaking

Gender in the Middle East & North Africa: Contemporary Issues and Challenges

Editors: J. Michael Ryan & Helen Rizzo

Reviewed by: Shereen Abouelnaga .English Department, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.

To publish yet another book entitled Gender in the MENA region is quite an academic adventure. Revamping the scholarship in the field gives the impression that no hiatus requires redressing. However, because Gender in the area is a highly fluid factor, it needs updating incessantly—the fluidity of gender results from the rapid change of the region’s socio-political reality. Gender inequality and, after all, Gender is part and parcel of this reality. hence , the malleability of Gender. Helen Rizzo and J. Michael Ryan aptly justify the need for revisiting the field:

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been of increasing interest in sociology, anthropology, political science, international relations, and others in academia and the general public. The near-constant military incursions, challenges to democratization, the threat of regional extremist groups (al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS]). The rise of regional cities to a global prominence level (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha) increased funding for international projects from the region (most notably Qatar). The increasing presence and “concern” over Muslims in the rest of the world are just a few reasons for this (2020: 1).

The above justification makes up the term ‘contemporary’ canvas compared to the region’s status in late 2010, only a decade ago. The rise of new governments, post-revolutionary, has yielded, paradoxically, more encroaching on Gender, men, and women. Such a bleak reality cannot be read through the orientalist lens that hastens to a flat conclusion. A strong link is established between religion (reads Islam) and oppression, through which gender inequality is rendered as a result.

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