Spring 5-2016

Arab Women in Development: A Postcolonial Legacy

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April 27, 2016

Abstract

The way in which women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have been portrayed in international development and rights discourse is based on a narrow, ahistorical view of Arab/Muslim majority societies, which exhibits an overconfidence in the discipline of economics and the ideology of neoliberalism, or free-market economics. Based on arguments presented by anthropologists, feminist economists, geographers, sociologists, comparative literary scholars and others, I explore in this thesis the legacy of colonialism in MENA in its various incarnations: as physical colonization in the 19th and 20th centuries; as suppression of indigenous knowledge in favor of scientific, western knowledge; as speaking on behalf of women and making general assumptions about their behaviors, desires and motivations; as ignorance of the West's contribution to social, economic and political problems; and as the power to restructure modern Arab economies in ways that hurt poor households and women in particular.

I engage in an empirical analysis of a recent World Bank document focusing on the status of women in MENA societies and economies to determine which narratives dominate, and which viewpoints are omitted. Due to the complicated nature of everyday life in this region, I suggest that various qualitative studies, such as those presented throughout the thesis, are crucial to understanding what different women in the region want, if anything, from the international community. I also suggest that the mainstream development community curb its enthusiasm for free-market economics, as these ideologies have done more harm than good for women in MENA. Instead, the world should make an effort to listen to different viewpoints and acknowledge the complex history of western involvement that has contributed to the circumstances in which these women live.

Executive Summary

Based on the prevalence of media and international human rights conversations that focus on the perceived oppression of women in Arab/Muslim majority societies, the international community seems to hold a special concern for this demographic. In the industry of international economic and social development, the focus is often on women's low levels of participation in the workforce and lack of freedom in public places, blaming cultural and religious factors as if they grew inevitably out of the fabric of an isolated society. This thesis aims to shed light on how these viewpoints came about, and how they are being reinforced through the documents and policies of mainstream development institutions such as the World Bank and the UN. It also explores how the global hierarchy of knowledge about the region has favored western perspectives, including the dominance of free market economics and its influence on public policy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, often to the detriment of the most marginal members of these societies.

Through a gender analysis of development issues and discourse inspired largely by anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, who challenged her readers to rethink assumptions about the condition of Arab/Muslim women, I argue that reductionist views of this demographic came from Europeans in the colonial MENA region, and have more recently been masked by the technical, professional solutions proposed in development. Much of my examination of colonialism comes from scholars' analyses of the literature and political communications of that era, as well as Abu-Lughod's critique of a 21st century UN report on the state of Arab women. Based on Abu-Lughod's critique, I perform empirical research using my own observations about language used in a World Bank report on Arab women and the UN's Human Development Index

materials. To counter some of the free market arguments that much of the authoritative western viewpoints represent, I lastly draw from feminist critiques of national economic data measurements, and economics as a discipline in general. To demonstrate the damage done in the name of economistic ideologies, I refer to anthropological accounts of women's survival tactics in MENA.

Because no person or society exists in modern day without historical context or global links, the overarching theme in my thesis is the legacy of colonialism in MENA in its various forms. These take shape as: physical colonization in the 19th and 20th centuries; suppression of indigenous knowledge in favor of scientific, western knowledge; speaking on behalf of women and making general assumptions about their behaviors, desires and motivations; ignorance of the West's contribution to social, economic and political problems; and the power to restructure modern Arab economies in ways that hurt poor households and women in particular. This critical, historical and reflective approach is essential to untangling the complex web of political, economic, and social factors creating the negative conditions that the West is intent on fixing, while questioning whether or not these repair efforts are warranted in the first place.

Table of Contents

Preface

Why does the white girl want to study Arab women?

I am a middle-class, agnostic American female of mixed European ancestry who has never experienced blatant oppression, physical danger or significant prejudice. Given my background, it may seem odd or unjustified that I focus my research on a demographic I will never intimately understand; a group that has been subject to such scrutiny in the eyes of the media and Western politics, and which has been a target of the concerted international political-economic interventions (and occasional derogation) that I explore in this thesis. So, why do I not focus on my own demographic or that of my ancestors? There are a few reasons.

I was originally drawn to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region due to a random decision to study the Arabic language, with which I subsequently became enamored. The language was my intellectual conduit into MENA, and both an affinity for social issues and a female identity steered me towards an interest in the women who live there. Ever the contrarian, I am also intrigued by nearly any topic that could be described as widely misunderstood. From my studies and my (limited) time spent in an Arab country, I think it is not hyperbolic to state that these women are indeed misunderstood.

For nearly as long as I have been engaged in international studies, I have been dissatisfied by knowledge that originates from a position of global superiority, prosperity, safety and intellectual hubris. The overarching ideas that have inspired this journey are things that I believe most North Americans and Europeans take for granted. Firstly, I consider the concept of modernity: the West's hero-worshipping of science and technology, of natural landscapes transformed and utilized in the pursuit of capital, profit, and a hastened future. Secondly, as this "progress" would not have been possible were it not for uneven capital accumulation resulting from the domination of other societies, I will explore colonialism in MENA and its lasting impact on the social and economic makeup of communities and states. Other concepts that underscore life in the modern West, such as individuality, are situated in our specific cultural heritage as Europeans (or descendants thereof), and also should not be assumed as universal.

The processes leading up to this final product have truly transformed my worldview, creating a sense of discomfort that I cannot shed, and thus must explore. To get there, I drew from the influential works of Middle Eastern and feminist scholars – many of them quite critical – to gain as much insight as possible into the lives of the Arab women who have been fetishized to the extent that a piece of cloth has become an object of terror. Through this investigation, I hope to contribute in any way possible to a more balanced picture of a marginalized group. As I aim to show, these women are as complex and diverse as any other group, yet in an international lens have been unfairly reduced to an oppressed, faceless mass of humans incapable of improving their own circumstances. I am not stating that western perspectives are altogether illegitimate, but rather that they need to be understood for what they are: *perspectives*, not one-size-fits-all solutions for all of the world's ills.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Capstone Advisor, Dr. Tom Perreault in the Geography department, for patiently dealing with the meandering of my thesis over the past year and a half, and for providing excellent feedback, insight and personal library loans throughout the process. I also thank Dr. Farhana Sultana in Geography, for her important contributions to my intellectual growth, especially regarding gender and women's issues in the developing world. I credit them both, as well as countless others at Syracuse University, for my ability to write such an extensive thesis after only two and a half years of full-time coursework.

Chapter 1

Introduction

"To become modern...is to act like the West"

- Timothy Mitchell (2000, p. 1)

Objectives

Since the mid-20th century, there has been a prevailing notion among rich European and North American world powers (collectively "the West") that their economic policies, technological fixes and funding are necessary to develop and modernize less industrialized countries (or "developing countries"). There is also a more recent international consensus that women's participation must be a factor in this development. In a post-9/11 world, the West has increasingly had a particular interest in women in Arab countries, seeking to liberate them from their seemingly oppressive, secluded existence through economic empowerment and a direct role in national growth (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Based on the way in which western donors and policymakers portray global development goals and measure and compare progress among nations, it would appear that cultural factors and social norms have been to blame for developing countries' difficult circumstances and for the low status of women within their economies and societies. However, as this thesis aims to show, these conditions are neither naturally occurring, nor do they exist in isolated, ahistorical context. Nor are they particularly easy to explain.

The objective of this thesis is to demonstrate how notions of modernity and progress, which are the bases of modern economic and social development, are western-borne and not universally valued or easily implementable in the Middle East and North Africa ("MENA") region. It is also my goal to demonstrate that the essentialist portrayal of women in this region is

insufficient ground for any exogenous intervention, let alone one so invasive and contested as "development." It is important to note here that the particular way in which I use the term development throughout this investigation, unless otherwise specified, refers to the set of processes and interventions that seek to transform developing countries into replicas of industrialized societies in terms of economic productivity, social norms and human rights. In MENA, much of this narrative focuses on integrating Arab women into the public sphere and capitalizing on their economic potential.

Given the alleged "gender paradox" of the region (World Bank, 2013 and Adely, 2013), where Arab women have become healthier and more educated but remain largely unemployed or underemployed, this is a call to question overly simplistic assumptions and explanations emanating mostly from western media and development doctrine. Instead of placing the usual blame on cultural and religious factors, which undoubtedly have impacts on women's daily experiences, this thesis will present alternative evidence and commentaries that consider the complex and ever-evolving social and economic conditions of MENA, and how women in particular have lived through them.

My thesis is also a stand against uncritical acceptance of words (terminology), labels (taxonomy) and ideas (epistemology) based on the often-ignored hierarchy of global knowledge that favors western narratives over others. I even acknowledge here that there are problems in my use of the terms "Arab women" or "Muslim women", as these markers have a tendency to place identities upon individuals in Arabic-speaking and Muslim-majority countries with which they may not identify (Lazreg, 1994, p. 7). Let this be a disclaimer of my recognition that the countries of MENA are ethnically and religiously diverse, and that my use of these terms needs to be understood as a matter of convenience and convention in line with the discourse I am

analyzing.[1] I also recognize the irony of using other restrictive labels such as *developing* or *developed countries*, when that is precisely one of the forms of ideological tyranny I am struggling against.

Research Methods

Through a postcolonial gender analysis of development issues and discourse inspired largely by anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, who challenged her readers to rethink assumptions about the condition of Arab/Muslim women, I will explore how disparaging and essentialist attitudes towards Arab women have modern roots in the colonial era and have become more understated through the perceived benevolence of development discourse and practice. Much of the critique of colonialism comes from discursive analysis of colonial era texts (i.e., Edward Said's account of Orientalism) culminating in Abu-Lughod's critique of the 2005 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), as well as critical accounts of western intervention in the colonial Middle East, especially regarding the impacts on gender relations.

Based on Abu-Lughod's model, I am performing empirical research using my own observations about word choice to analyze a World Bank report and Human Development Index materials. To counter some of the free market arguments that much of the authoritative western viewpoints represent, I will draw from feminist economist critiques of data gathered at a national level. To demonstrate the damage done in the name of economistic ideologies, I will refer to anthropological accounts of low-income Arab women's survival tactics from the 1980s, as well as more recent research looking at alternatives to women's formal labor force participation and poverty coping strategies such as informal work and social/charitable networks.

[1] In other words, I recognize the problematic way in which labels such as "Arab" and "Muslim" are applied and conflated with one another when referring to individuals and groups.

Development and its Institutions[2]

We can't begin to understand the effects of development on MENA without first grasping some of the main theories in question and the institutions that promote western ideas in the region, both discursively and in practice. Firstly, the primary driver of development is the desire for and aim towards achieving a state of futurity; i.e., *modernity*, or progress. Much of the intellectual and technological strides made in Europe and North America during the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution were attributed to the theory of environmental determinism, where certain physical environments are thought to enable superior human intelligence and faster progress than others; and the Cartesian rationalism of western thought, which is viewed as more sophisticated than that of other cultures due to its ability to employ logical, clear reasoning (which is also believed to be an attribute of the male mind).

Based on these assumptions, *modernization theory* came as an explicit, antithetical response to the Soviet threat beginning in the 20th century, gaining steam in the 1940s through the rise of Bretton Woods institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Exemplified by economist W.W. Rostow's 1960 model entitled *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, which insisted that development occurs linearly and in stages ranging from traditional to highly consumptive societies, this process was assumed to be universally applicable without consideration of historical contexts, geography or social norms. This drive for modernity, based on the template of an industrialized western society, relies upon technological advances and industries that are structured around urban centers and white-collar skillsets. Through the modernization model, the world became further symbolically divided into regions representing progress (the West) and backwardness (the rest). The free market economy

[2] All information referenced is from Peet and Hartwick (2015), unless otherwise cited.

was also to play a role in poorer states' development, because the spread of technologies required their openness to western investment, aid, and corporate activity.

The concept of economic *neoliberalism* – also known as 'free-market economics' – is similarly normative and aligned with a western model of growth. Essentially a revival of 19th century liberal economics that touted the power of the free market and was based on egoistic values, this strain of economic thought came to the political foreground in the 1970s as a critique of Socialism and state-led (*Keynesian*) growth. It was also a tangible set of processes to address accumulation of unproductive capital in western banks in the preceding decades, acting as a shift in material relations that ultimately benefitted western capitalists: what Marxist geographer David Harvey (2005, p. 16) referred to as "a project to achieve the restoration of class power". Due to the timing of neoliberalism's ascent, when fiscally conservative governments were in power in Europe and the US, state intervention in economies and development was largely abandoned in favor of free trade and economic liberalization, at least as far as elites in the powerful capitalist nations were concerned. Some supporters of neoliberalism even blamed the economic crises and anti-war movements of the 1960s through 1980s, in part, on overly generous welfare states, though the true causes are much more complex.

In development policy, neoliberal ideals solidified into the *Washington Consensus*, where senior US government officials as well as technocrats of the Washington-based International Financial Institutions adopted policy prescriptions for developing countries who borrow from these entities. To the political right, the Consensus was an intoxicating cocktail of deregulation, liberalization of trade, openness to foreign direct investment, privatization and reduction of government spending. Functionally, these measures were thrust upon the Global South through *structural adjustment programs* (SAPs), the conditionality placed on countries borrowing from

the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to follow the prescriptions of the Consensus in exchange for debt relief and development assistance. Since their inception in the 1980s, the SAPs have failed at stimulating economic growth, and created conditions that were unfavorable to the lower classes and to women. It remains unclear what policies or ideologies will replace SAPs and neoliberalism in the future. As of now, some of the Washington Consensus policy prescriptions are still evident in poverty alleviation (and even gender equality) discourse targeting MENA, which will be shown in the textual analysis later in this thesis.

Thesis Structure

Beginning in Chapter 2, I will argue that colonial interests and Orientalist views have contributed to modern development agendas and discourses that target women in the Arab world, presenting these women as a unitary group subject to antiquated cultural practices while erasing any culpability of the former colonizers in creating these conditions of poverty and gender inequality that development seeks to remedy. In Chapter 3, I will use Abu-Lughod's analysis of the AHDR 2005 as a basis for examining a 2013 World Bank report that focuses on the underrepresentation of women in MENA economies using highly normative, technocratic language while overlooking the intrinsic virtues and human welfare aspects of gender parity. I will also cover some of the more complex factors that inhibit women's labor force participation in the region, which the report did not address. Lastly, in Chapter 4, I will argue that pro-market narratives expounded largely by economists and sympathetic policymakers have been historically exclusionary to women, especially the global standards for measuring national economic activity, and are therefore inappropriate for intervention. I will also show the harm caused by neoliberal ideology in practice, and the coping strategies of the women affected. In

particular, I will show that the MENA presence of informal sector work and both formal and informal social institutions, which have provided support for poorer women in deteriorating circumstances, reflect the failure of these economic models.

As the title of this thesis suggests, I approach my arguments with a historical lens focused on the lasting impacts of modern western imperialism in the MENA region. Given this aim, throughout this work I will examine the following manifestations of colonialism: as physical colonization in the 19th and 20th centuries; as suppression of indigenous knowledge in favor of scientific, western knowledge; as speaking on behalf of Arab women and making general assumptions about their behaviors, desires and motivations; as ignorance of the West's contribution to social, economic and political problems; and as the power to restructure economies in ways that hurt poor households and women in particular. I will begin in the next chapter with the first and most obvious manifestation.

Chapter 2

Colonialism, Orientalism and Essentialist Views of Arab Women

Introduction

It is difficult to go any significant length of time without reading or hearing a story in the media about the predicament of women in the Arab world. As with women in the rest of the developing world, this group is also commonly featured in international development and human rights discourses. One notorious example of this was a speech by former First Lady Laura Bush nearly 15 years ago, which resulted in a conflation of Islam and terrorism that aimed to "justify American military intervention in Afghanistan" and, in particular, to save Muslim women from this singular form of oppression (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 32). Perhaps less conspicuously in 2015 alone, major reports were issued by international agencies affiliated with the United Nations (UN) such as "Arab Women and Legalization"[3], "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015"[4], and "Arab Regional Synthesis Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action Twenty Years Later"[5], all of which reiterated the inequalities between the sexes regarding many issues in the region, with a particular emphasis on poverty, rights and women's economic participation.

However, "understandings" about this demographic that have enabled fascination, scholarship and intervention of the West – ideas of victimhood and uniformity of condition – are neither harmless nor ahistorical, especially when this knowledge is operationalized through

[3] *All websites cited are accurate as of April 2016.*
UN Women and UNDP, January 2015: http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/all/arab-women-and-legalization
[4] ILO, October 2015: http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/youth/2015/WCMS_412015/lang--en/index.htm
[5] UNESCWA, UN Women and LAS, 2015: http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/all/the-implementation-of-the-beijing-platform

international development initiatives that affect the lives of these women while reinforcing their passivity in the eyes of the world. The supposedly benevolent concern for this Other may also be a distraction from western political missteps in the Arab world or even domestically; in her book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) criticized the West's obsession with the plight of Muslim women and the tendency to blame culture and religion instead of historical, global and political causes for their oppression, such as the American role in supporting repressive regimes in the Middle East. Likewise, Edward Said attributed the widespread acrimony towards the Arab Other in the US as a distraction from internal injustices experienced in America daily at the hands of the government (Jhally, 1998).

Miriam Cooke (2000) put forth a striking statement about the postcolonial transformation of control when she claimed that "decolonization eliminates the physical representation of power, but in its ruins linger the seeds of a new hegemony that retains its base in the Euro-American sphere but that has assumed the anonymity of global capital and culture" (p. 156). European colonialism has had a lasting influence on the social, economic and political systems of the MENA region, as well as the attitudes held about Arabs by the West (and about the West by Arabs), even though Europe's direct rule of these countries is no longer a factor. Looking at the recent history of Arab women's marginalization, beginning with colonialism and the ideology of Orientalism that provided its justification, is especially important because of the unknowingly ethnocentric discourses in modern international development (McEwan, 2008) that favor a western worldview of modernity and women's rights (Abu-Lughod, 2009).

This chapter will argue that these opinions of Arabs held by many in the West today are the ideological descendants of a lengthy history of inimical relations and racism that gained particular strength through the Orientalist scholarship purveyed by European colonizers in the

Middle East. This state-sanctioned typecasting of Arabs and Muslims of both genders by European officials, artists and intellectuals was especially important in shaping the social, economic and political atmosphere for women living in the region today, particularly regarding the gendered divide between public and private spaces. As it is often stated that international economic development is a form of neocolonialism, women in the Arab world have had a considerable disadvantage throughout this process, and especially through the international language of development, which has a tendency to overgeneralize the disparate circumstances and values of women who are as complex and dissimilar from one another as in any developed nation. In the upcoming sections I will provide a background on the concepts of colonialism and Orientalism as they relate to the people of the MENA region. I will then offer examples of how these concepts and structures have taken hold in western scholarship to the disadvantage of Arab women. Lastly, I will argue that the tendency to denigrate this demographic and fixate on the backwardness of their culture has persisted in a more subtle form through modern development discourse.

Colonialism and Orientalism

In his groundbreaking 1978 work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said argued that the intellectual concept of Orientalism was not a result of impartial observation and data gathering about the Orient, but rather was a process that reflected the interests of those who sought this knowledge. As such, the outcome of this systematic, "objective" and scientific process of archiving inevitably distorted the reality of life in the so-called Orient, specifically in the region with which Said was familiar: the Middle East. Through textual analysis of popular literature and art produced throughout the colonial period, he argued it is possible to see that (mis)conceptions

about Arabs and the Middle East did not vary much over time, lending to a perceived "image outside of history", to quote Said (Jhally, 1998). Although Orientalism is often understood as a product of European literary and artistic (non-scholarly) depictions that exoticized the peoples and cultures of the Near and Far East during colonial exploration, for the purposes of this thesis I use the term to refer more generally to the views held by colonial powers of their subjects as the backward and inescapably different "Other"; i.e., incapable of conducting their own affairs and thus requiring European intervention (Keddie, 2007).

In his introduction, Said explained Orientalism in a way that resonates fully with the postcolonial analysis of development institutions and discourse undertaken in this thesis. He claimed that the "corporate institution" of Orientalism took on the Orient "by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). The mindset of Orientalism, then, had lasting intellectual, material and social consequences in MENA.

Egypt, which was a British protectorate from 1882-1954 (Cammett et al., 2015) and is currently a large recipient of international aid (Harrigan and El Said, 2009), was a key focal point of Orientalist knowledge acquisition during the 19th and early 20th centuries due to its geographic location between Europe and the Far East. According to Said (1978), Egypt and the Islamic lands were like a "laboratory" for the West's Oriental knowledge (p. 43), and through this experimentation, Egypt had much of its modern history "annexed" to Britain's (p. 85). The distortion of Middle Eastern historiography, which flourished during colonialism, could be attributed to the fact that a great number of historians were traditionally Western men writing in languages other than Arabic "for the use and edification of foreigners" (Humphreys, 2006, p.

24). An early example of this would be the massive, twenty-three volume *Description de l'Égypte (1808-1828),* in which Napoleon's team of scientists and historians catalogued and translated into modern French practically everything they believed could be documented about Egypt at that time (Said, 1978).

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as evidenced by *Description de l'Égypte*, French scientists and intellectuals undertook massive documentation of Egypt's culture, history and natural environment, although Egypt was unable to reciprocate with any kind of systematic acquisition of knowledge on France (Jhally, 1998). According to Said, "Egypt was to become a department of French learning" (p. 83), suggesting that the Western archival of Middle Eastern knowledge was not for the immediate benefit of its native residents. From the outset, then, knowledge about Egypt was ossified under the auspices of European prowess, primarily for the advantage of Europeans. In addition to knowledge accumulation, channels of disseminating knowledge within Europe's occupied territories were also subject to colonial control: where education of the natives was allowed, subjects in schools were often dictated by colonial choice (Charlton, 1997) and limited to children of indigenous elites (Cammett et al., 2015), thus priming the Arab world for a present day in which it is difficult to determine how much knowledge is indigenous and how much is foreign.

During the colonial period, France assessed that Egypt was "plunged into barbarism", and lamented this largely because it was once home to a great civilization (Said, 1978, p. 85). Although much of the focus here has been on France, Britain had a longer period of influence in Egypt, and its stance on Arab inferiority was just as pronounced. In *Orientalism*, Said observed some of the viewpoints of Arthur James Balfour and Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer), who were dignitaries during the time of the British protectorate in Egypt, concluding that Britain's aim of

saving Egypt from its own backwardness was plain to see in speeches and communications of high-ranking officials. For example, Balfour justified British reign over Egypt as being for the greater good, indicating that "[w]e are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptians...we are there also for the sake of Europe at large" (as quoted in Said, 1978, p. 33).

Timothy Mitchell (2000) proposed that through colonial discourse, the alleged backwardness of the colonized populations was attributed by colonizers as a "weakness of the mental power of representation" (p. 21); an intrinsic cognitive deficiency among the lesser races that prevented them from understanding abstractions that the Europeans were well capable of grasping. This conviction of intellectual superiority authorized the colonizers to undertake the representation and evaluation of the MENA region themselves. Integral to the Orientalist attitudes that sanctioned colonialism, this assumed superiority is what enabled eurocentric discourses of western rationalism to prevail up to present day (Peet and Hartwick, 2015). However, the basis of Europe's hegemony was in the strategic colonial plunder of other societies' natural sources of wealth, rather than any biological or intellectual advantage (Blaut, 1976).

An obvious point of divergence between the West and the Arab world is religion. Although the conflict between Islam and Christianity dates back to the Crusades (Keddie, 2007), the modern bias against Islamic epistemology took hold during colonialism. Looking at religion's role in the imperial agenda, Said (1978) put forth that Egypt was used to bring the Orient closer to Europe and to diminish the abnormality and perceived enmity of Islam. One mechanism of this attempt to curb Islam's influence, for example, was when the colonial powers explicitly tried undermining the religion by educating Egyptian women in French missionary schools (Ahmed, 1989). According to Nikki Keddie (2007), although Protestant Christian

missionaries were prohibited from converting Muslims, they were "among the pioneers in educating Muslim girls" (p. 59), thus disseminating and reinforcing western attitudes in the Muslim world through the ostensible generosity of a formal education.

In French colonial Maghreb[6] – Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria – ethno-religious identity was given priority over national identity for talking about the indigenous subjects, where the different faiths were referred to by the French as "*musulmans* or *juifs indigene"*[7] (Cooke, 2000, p. 155). Miriam Cooke attributed this prioritization to the historic conflation of religion and civilization in Europe, dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries. According to her, "at a certain stage" (p. 155) during the colonial period Jews were granted French citizenship but Muslims were not, reinforcing a message that Muslims were not European material. For these and other Arabs who lived through the colonial period, religion understandably "served as a historical marker of belonging" (p. 156). Within a geospatial imagination, the tension between cultures strengthened the imaginative divide between East and West, while simultaneously widening the separation between genders within the local communities. I will next look at how Arab gender relations, in particular, were affected by colonialism.

Gender in the Colonial Middle East

The physical processes of colonialism, in which a company of foreigners enters a territory without permission to assert control over its resources and inhabitants, have gendered undertones of sexual violation and physical domination. In the words of Said, by pioneering new lands for the benefit of imperial expansion and knowledge acquisition, the Europeans utilized

[6] European presence in these three countries began with France conquering Algeria in 1830. It then made Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1912) its protectorates. Formalized European control in the Maghreb ended between the mid-1950s and 1962 (Keddie, 2007; Cammett et al., 2015).
[7] Indigenous Muslims/Jews.

their advantageous and masculine "freedom of intercourse" which could "penetrate...the great Asiatic mystery" (1978, p. 44). Using identical sexual imagery, Algerian sociologist Marnia Lazreg opined that French authors discursively "could...penetrate Algerian men's intimate life by having their wives and daughters as spoils of conquest" (1994, p. 39).

Examining stereotypes of Muslim women in Egypt that date back to the colonial period, Leila Ahmed (1982) put forth that Western ethnocentrism was also responsible for replicating certain female images that have negative connotations, such as the confinement of the harem, the injustices of polygamy, and the invisibility of the veil. By using these limiting and misunderstood symbols of Arab femininity, colonial agents and Orientalist artists and authors engaged in normative processes that painted Arab society and Muslims as backwards, portraying the women as passive victims of their own ignorance and Muslim men's barbarism. Nikki Keddie (2007) asserted that focusing on these men's mistreatment of women was an intentional tactic of the colonizers to show that Arabs were incapable of autonomy. Through the description, circulation and institutionalization of this so-called knowledge, the West claimed its cultural authority over the Oriental Other (Said, 1978).

This ill-conceived attempt at representation has had impacts on both genders: for example, Jordanian women and Bedouin men of colonial Jordan[8] were lumped together in the European administrators' imaginations – comparably envisioned as both traditional and spatially isolated from society. Jordanian-Palestinian scholar, Joseph Massad (2001), described them both as a "different species of citizens" (p. 51), with special attention paid to Bedouin men's feminine attributes that justified the British colonial administration's undertaking to settle and incorporate this population into Jordanian society and the military. Interestingly, Massad explained that the Oriental mystique of Bedouin culture and historic landmarks like Petra were transformed by the

[8] This period lasted from roughly 1919 until independence in 1946 (Massad, 2001).

British Mandate authorities into thriving tourist attractions that reinforce this image of traditionalism – an exaggerated and overly romantic representation of idyllic desert heritage that represents a "colonial, not a national" tradition. To this day, according to Massad, Jordanians simultaneously embrace this tradition as part of their culture and rebuke it in the face of global pressures of modernization (p. 75).

Expanding upon the spatial isolation of Arab women during colonialism, Miriam Cooke (2000) asserted that their removal from occupied public spaces and exclusion from history was a strategy to gain Muslim men's acquiescence under colonial rule. She also added that this gendered segregation and marginalization of Arab women under colonialism was a basis for their current weak relationship to global capital and culture. This would suggest that, despite popular belief to the contrary, the reasons for Arab women's economic underperformance and other poor development indicators are in large part due to the functional outcomes of historic external pressures, not simply caused by cultural or religious considerations from within their societies.

In a literary representation of colonial experience in the Maghreb, Islamic feminist scholar Leila Ahmed (1982) described an Algerian novel in which men were "colonized in the street", while the Arab woman's domain of the home was a safe space that no foreigner could trespass, and this dichotomy increased women's passivity (p. 164). Arabic literary expert, Marilyn Booth (2006), suggested that in both Palestine and Egypt, the concepts of women's honor and shame were likewise invoked in opposition to the encroaching imperialist threat, and the use of honor in this resistance "was articulated as community preservation" (p. 216). The conflation of community welfare with women's purity suggests that both genders experienced a form of emasculation under occupation.

Perhaps this was a situation in which men saw the enclosure of women and protection of their virtue as an aspect of their lives still under their control, due to the unbroken sanctity of the woman's space in the domestic realm. Comparative literary scholar Yaseen Noorani (2010) argued that the transformation of Arab femininity during colonialism was a tool for expressing newly emergent national ideals and identities, contrasting the qualities of this changing femininity through Arab women's appearances in both classical and reformist literature. He deduced that in the classical arena, they were represented as "primordial, chaotic desire" (p. 109), and the new Arab woman, through a Victorian-era, bourgeois relegation to the private sphere, stood for the "negation of desire"; a crucial ingredient for the new moral ordering of anti-colonial resistance and the edification of the new nation-state (p. 109).

This sense of inferiority conferred upon women was not limited to individuals or families: the pejorative images of women and more "traditional" aspects of Arab culture ran in parallel to the subjugation and feminization of the former power structures of the colonized territories. In that respect, Fatima Mernissi (1991) described the colonial Muslim state as "veiled, obliterated, nonexistent" (p. 21). In a similar fashion, Amir Abdullah of Jordan expressed to the Syrians in a 1920 communication that the colonizers had robbed the Arabs of their "faith, freedom, and masculinity" (Massad, 2001, p. 89). Abdullah also equated colonization with rape, which for men, in his view, was a process of emasculation and feminization akin to castration (p. 89).

Though the amir was referring to the former Ottoman occupation, in his chain of metaphors, colonialism and womanhood were one in the same, representing a lack of freedom in the burgeoning Arab states due to the European presence. Joseph Massad (2001) asserted that Abdullah's concern with masculinity, in opposition to the colonial presence, was related more to

establishing “public morality” (p. 89) than gender identity, and that this contributed to the Jordanian government’s concern for women’s appearance and presence in the public sphere (i.e., being seen unveiled or wearing makeup), citing the Qur’an and soliciting support from religious leaders. The amir’s Islamic conservatism laid the groundwork for the state’s interest in gendered public behavior as way to solidify national character, since women’s appearance was targeted in particular as part of the “national inheritance of ‘conventional virtues’” (p. 90). While this doesn’t negate the argument that women’s status is due to religious and cultural norms, it does demonstrate that expectations and stereotypes of Arab/Muslim women may be influenced by external factors dating back to colonialism. Yet, as we will see in the next section, explanations used in much of the modern discourse are still crafted superficially without addressing the past in any meaningful way.

Post-colonial Attitudes and Arab Women in Development

The viewpoints of Orientalist scholars and European colonial agents towards their subjects may have been overtly racist or dehumanizing, but modern scholarship also has an effect on global imaginations, especially in regards to the status of non-western women. This effect may even prove to have more lasting power than old-fashioned Orientalism due to its beneficent, charitable aims. A certain insidious danger, however, lies within modern development discourse: as can be concluded from a critical view of colonialism and Orientalism, modern viewpoints (including the language used in development discourse) were informed by centuries of knowledge acquisition enabled by an imbalance of power and cultural authority. Additionally, targeted development initiatives at any scale other than the individual does not

have much capacity to address the complexities that define the inner lives, gender relations and social interchanges of the people who ultimately benefit from these efforts.

Long outlasting its usefulness in the media as a Cold War marker of non-aligned, pre-industrial (and in many cases, post-colonial) states, the persistent use of the term "Third World" in regard to women has had a homogenizing effect on this incredibly variegated and populous group, making it seem that all women in developing countries have unfortunate circumstances just because of the soil on which they were born or raised. Geographer Cheryl McEwan (2008) noted that this type of designation fails to recognize political and economic stratification within a population, and through this homogenization, a subtle process of Othering underlies the documents and dialogues of development. An interesting assertion by Chandra Mohanty (1997) was that the singular "Third World Woman" is a natural byproduct of the "scientific inquiry" (p. 86) that is inextricably tied to the processes of colonization in these countries.

Although the qualifying term "Third World" seems to have fallen out of favor within international organizations, successors like "Least/Lesser Developed County" or "Low Income Country" still have an evaluative undercurrent that compares nations on a spectrum of wealth. By liberally using these terms, it is implied that these "lesser than" countries need to develop and accumulate a larger national income in order to advance. Naturally, these designations do not have the ability to enable a distant viewer to understand what life must be like for any particular individual in *any* country, let alone those that have had so much of their history and knowledge subsumed under a foreign culture.

The assessments of essentialism and homogenization provided by McEwan (2008) and Mohanty (1997) prove useful when considering the particular concern for Arab and Muslim women, who, as we are apparently certain, are suffering to a greater extent under the primitive

conditions and patriarchal Islamic state structures depicted by the media and other institutions aligned with western political and economic interests. Said argued that this pathetic image of Middle Eastern peoples portrayed in western media has not been contested by Arab governments because of their dependence on American and European aid, in fear of jeopardizing its continuous delivery (Jhally, 1998). Unlike the former direct rule by European colonial powers, the dominant American influence of today is much more covert, but it has been politicized by a strong relationship with Israel. In Said's view as a Palestinian, this western-oriented, anti-Arab state has thus influenced America's version of Orientalism through the surreptitious omission of balanced viewpoints on Arabs and/or Islam (Jhally, 1998), which makes itself apparent in the depoliticized, pro-modernization language of development.

Despite evidence that suggests there are significant impacts on Arab women's poor participation in economies that stem from colonialism, the focus within international policy documents has remained on cultural and religious values that many scholars and development experts deem obstructive to social and national progress. In an analysis of the *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* ("AHDR"), Lila Abu-Lughod (2009) gave credit to its ambition and thoroughness. However, she lamented that despite the fact that many of the authors are intellectuals and activists from Arab countries, their cosmopolitan perspectives and support by the UN Development Program (UNDP) inevitably led to an "international dialect" of rights that is problematic and not necessarily applicable to non-elites in the MENA region (p. 84). She stated that the report, in its entirety, painted all Arab women as uniform in their misfortune and unique from a global perspective, while it also implied that gender equality had been achieved in other places.

Abu-Lughod critiqued the report's chapter on social structures, stating it lacked a historical context and denounced Arab women's ties to family or tribe. It also argued women's subordination within modern family hierarchies to be rooted in a timeless Islamic/Arabic origin, ignoring the possible role of industrialization, agricultural capitalism, state building, and colonialism. One of the main biases influencing the goals of development strategies in the Middle East, she asserted, is the undervaluation of traditional knowledge because it is considered substandard to a formal (i.e., western, scientific) education. The intellectuals who contributed to the AHDR report are most likely from the generation of Arabs who came of age during or after the period of modernization in the Middle East and, as such, tend to underestimate hereditary learning and skills (2009).

A claim made in the report that disturbed Abu-Lughod was when the authors suggested that rural and nomadic girls' illiteracy "erodes their very human status", as it is assumed they do not know about human rights (p. 88). However, she also acknowledged that mere access to education does not necessarily guarantee its quality, concluding that both boys and girls suffer from poor public education in many cases due to state-level insufficiencies, not barriers based on gender. Reviewing the same AHDR report, Arab Studies scholar Fida Adely (2009) suggested that women's preferences within Arab countries have not always matched the assumptions laid out in development programs when creating education frameworks, such as the focus on education for male-dominated, wage labored fields.

Adely pointed out that the MENA region represents a "gender paradox" in the view of the World Bank (p. 108), where high educational attainment rates are mismatched with low labor force rates. She concluded that the report's emphasis on capabilities and choice are misleading, because it doesn't acknowledge larger issues and structural inequalities. Even with its efforts to

be progressive, such as its acknowledgment of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the war's impact on women as a development target in the Arab world, it raised "the same middle-class, liberal ideal of modern women" (p. 108) who have the capacity to choose their own political engagements, status, fertility, and other opportunities if they are just given an adequate education.

Adely thus conjectured, like Abu-Lughod, that the authors of the document engaged in a lengthy value judgment that favored a narrative of modernization, economic empowerment and formal employment. At the same time as it emphasized women's apparent need for formalized education and entry into the workforce to bring the MENA region up to "universal" human development standards, it wrote off any other ways in which knowledge can be gained or utilized that are authentic to (and desired by) the women who are the targets of development. In summary, Abu-Lughod and Adely both emphasized that, despite good intentions, the language used in the report came from privileged, western-influenced perspectives. Adely even asserted that the human development approach is not a "significant departure from earlier conceptualizations of development" (p. 109). Thus it seems that the epistemological dilemma put forth by postcolonial critics may not be overcome when international institutions, born largely of North American and European efforts and funding, are the main catalysts for driving policy and investing in development.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the critiques of scholars focusing on the colonial era to the modern day, portrayals of backwardness in the Arab/Muslim world that originated in an Orientalist ideology can help explain the essentialist way in which Arab women have been incorporated as a focal

point of modern development. Beginning with European knowledge overwriting an authentic representation of Arab history, colonialism also controlled the native populations' education and deepened the divide between Islamic cultures and the West. The masculine aggression and threat of imperialism intensified the spatial isolation of Arab women and widened the public-private divide between the genders, and the Muslim state was even likened to a weakened or castrated man who underwent a process of feminization from the Europeans' rearrangement of power.

Evolving out of this era came a homogenous, underdeveloped (pun intended) view of the MENA region and its inhabitants. Influenced by conflicting political allegiances with the Arabs' regional and ideological foe, Israel, western biases have circumscribed the portrayals of Arabs in the media and made their way more indistinctly into the language and aims of development. From a wide, unfocused lens, Arab women have been universally portrayed as disadvantaged throughout this entire process, victimized by the West due to the perceived backwardness of Islam and patriarchal nature of Arab societies. A more careful and critical consideration of the history of the Middle East will show, however, that many of the conditions that development projects aim to repair are a result of the same political powers' interventions just a century or two earlier. In the following chapter, based on Abu-Lughod and Adely's critiques of the AHDR 2005, I will analyze some of the discourse in more recent development documents from the UN and World Bank to show that the biases towards western development models are very much still present in the second decade of the 21st century.

Chapter 3

Discursive Analysis of a Development Document on Arab/MENA Women

Introduction

In the powerful business of international development and the fuzzy, ill-defined contours of globalization, knowledge is power. Despite a marked shift in mainstream development discourse away from pure modernization theory of the 1950s through 1970s (Peet and Hartwick, 2015), much of the information that drives development is derived from often misleading national statistics (Benería, 1981; Waring, 1988). Additionally, well into the 21st century, the scholarship that produces and disperses the ideas promoted through development discourse is still predominantly informed by neoliberal economic theory (Abu-Lughod, 2009). Because much of the globalization research focused on the Arab world is sponsored by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), it reproduces pro-globalization viewpoints that do not fully appreciate the political and social repercussions that increasing economic integration can create (Harrigan and El-Said, 2009).

Due to the influence of the World Bank's scholarship in reinforcing these neoliberal values, in this chapter I will be drawing inspiration from the critiques of the 2005 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) report by Lila Abu-Lughod and Fida Adely (2009) to analyze a similarly normative document released in 2013 by the World Bank Group ("the Bank"), entitled *MENA Development Report, Opening Doors: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa*, which I will refer to hereafter as the "Opening Doors" report. I will also begin with a brief overview and analysis of the UN's Human Development Index (HDI), a composite measurement that has inspired many of the claims made in the report.

Like Abu-Lughod and Adely, I argue that even the more "progressive" concepts in mainstream development (such as the measuring of HDI) as well as the positions espoused by the Bank are eurocentric, dependent upon econometric models of assessing development, and as a result are uncritical, ahistorical and incomplete. In the following sections, I challenge the bias towards quantifiability, and provide a conceptual and textual analysis of the Opening Doors report based on some of its key arguments. For contrast, I also include more cultured explanations of the infamous MENA gender gap in employment based on research that is oriented toward political science, sociology, anthropology and feminist scholarship rather than purely economics.

Human Development Index (HDI)

After decades of focusing on national income growth as the determinant of developmental achievement, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) adopted the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990 to capture a wider range of measurements that might give insight into quality of life beyond just financial well-being (UNDP HDI website[9] and White, 2008). According to the UNDP, this approach is meant to represent a "qualitative life"[10], which today includes myriad dimensions such as life expectancy and quality, knowledge, political participation, human rights, security, environmental sustainability and gender equality. This plurality is also referred to as the "Capabilities Approach" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 18), as it aims to enable individuals to achieve their potential, with a particular emphasis on individual freedom and choice, and a respect for human dignity and justice.

[9] http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/what-human-development.
[10] http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/what-human-development

The Capabilities Approach (or HDI; however the concept is referenced) has ultimately sought to alter the paths and discourses of development (Nussbaum, 2011). It is perhaps ironic that the existence and promotion of the HDI demonstrates the global community's need for quantification, even of supposedly qualitative characteristics. Despite this potential incongruity, the evolution of development towards this more holistic vision was well warranted, and demonstrates the fruits of the research that helped shift development, in whatever way possible, away from its narrow roots in post-WWII economic recovery and growth (Binns, 2008).

The way in which these more comprehensive HDI assessments are distributed to the global community is through the Human Development Report (HDR), which has been issued annually by UNDP since 1990 (Nussbaum, 2011). Additional country-level reports are issued less frequently, and the regional HDRs, such as the 2005 AHDR mentioned in Chapter 2, are less frequent as well. According to UNDP, the AHDR, which was first published in 2002, arose out of the concern for the future of the Arab world amid the geopolitical and military intervention that was precipitating at the turn of the millennium.[11] Accordingly, it can be interpreted from the source that global political factors influence the dissemination of HDI via the timing and distribution of the AHDRs.

When perusing the current UNDP website for Human Development Reports under the Country Profiles section (see Figure 2 for examples)[12], visitors will encounter a sleek, interactive choropleth map featuring soothing shades of blue that visually distinguish the four groupings of "Human Development" on a continuum: Very High (navy), High (bold blue), Medium (lighter blue), and Low (the lightest blue). The data used in this particular infographic were those

[11] http://www.arab-hdr.org/about/intro.aspx
[12] http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries

represented in the most recent (2015) Human Development Report. The website, as well as the information represented, is well groomed and visually appealing.

From browsing the website, it is also clear that methodologies of capturing human development statistics are not static. For example, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was used for the first time in the 2010 HDR, with the intent of representing non-income factors of poverty ("overlapping deprivations") such as child mortality, nutrition, assets, sanitation, and more. The expansive sources for these calculations could be overwhelming to the layperson, especially when demonstrated in a flow diagram (Figure 1)[13]. Further probing into the methodologies and components of HDI calculations may actually create more confusion due to the complexity and interrelated factors with which the UNDP creates these composite evaluations.

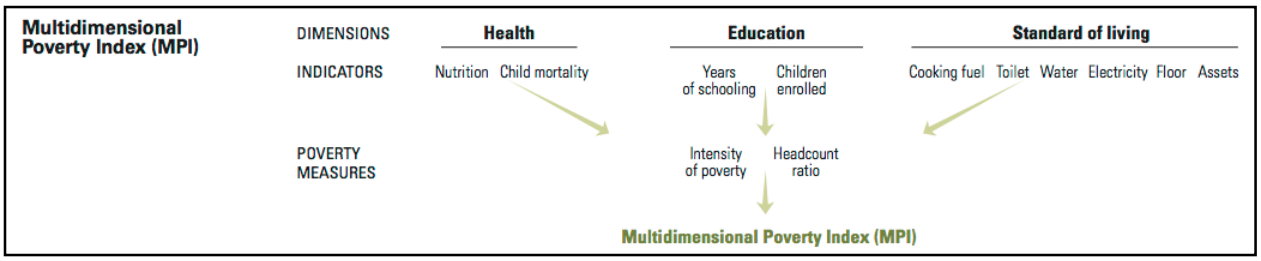

Figure 1: Excerpt from 2015 HDR Technical notes

[13] Accessed from: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2015_technical_notes.pdf

Figure 2: Choropleth country maps of International Human Development Indicators, 2015 HDR

Timothy Mitchell (2000) argued that numerical representations of the nebulous State entity, outside of mere geographic delineation, have made it possible to compare and categorize nations. Indeed, when I – a reluctantly patriotic American – visited the interactive HDI choropleth map for the first time, it was impossible not to hover my cursor over the navy blue shape of the United States without thinking "why isn't my country number one?!" (it is currently ranked eighth). When seduced by quantitative figures and slick infographics, it is all too easy to forget that these indicators are not wholly representative of reality, yet upon reflection it should

seem obvious that they are mere abstractions and generalizations, unable to fully demonstrate the diverse economic, social and political circumstances that women and men experience in *any* region, let alone a region such as MENA, where the champions of these statistics (mostly western policymakers) have little, if any, expertise.

Measuring and attempting to comprehend the world in such a way helps reinforce the values that international norm-setting organizations, such as the UN, suggest are universal. This includes those represented with the HDI indicators: economic productivity, high life expectancy, high education levels, and equal access between women and men to these benefits. However desirable these values might be to any particular person, the basic scale with which they are represented – by country – is problematic. At the personal (individual) level, it suggests citizens' complicity in such a categorization, as if they had a choice in their nationality, or that by getting an education and participating productively in their national economy, they are contributing to the betterment of the state and its performance in respect to all others. At the international level, these measurements give the impression of the state as an isolated entity that is fully in control of (and responsible for) its own progress.

Martha Nussbaum suggested that the nation holds "moral importance" (2011, p. 113) for its people, as citizens' entitlements are outlined in constitutions, and that the focus upon the state is a matter of convenience when determining which entity is responsible for developing human capabilities. Regardless of which delimitation is appropriate to measure human capability, when reviewing HDI measurements across a region or across the globe, the inequalities are glaring and ought to raise questions about how they came to be. Statistics alone will not tell us anything about historical processes; yet the UN and numerous other large and small institutions accept these rankings uncritically as impetus for action. Anthropologist Tania Li described this

reductionist tendency in development as the process of "rendering technical" (2005, p. 389), whereby complex social issues are made more tangible and less political by outlining specific boundaries and measurements to justify both a problem's diagnosis and the prescriptive measures for intervention. The institution that will be analyzed here is the World Bank, which provides extensive and influential scholarship to the development community, often using the concepts of HDI to promote its pro-market stance.

World Bank MENA Report 2013[14]

As a major International Financial Institution (IFI) with considerable resources, the mission statement of the World Bank includes two main goals: to "End extreme poverty within a generation and boost shared prosperity"[15]. Given these priorities, the Bank has appointed itself as the "leading expert on poverty" (Harcourt, 2009, p. 19), a topic that has became particularly salient since 2000, when the Millennium Development Goals were devised as the dominant development framework for the UN. Given this importance, the Bank maintains its influential position in the development industry (Harcourt, 2009). Aside from lending power and a historical role as the mechanism that provided financing for reconstruction after the Second World War, it sustains this dominance in part through its prolific output and dissemination of knowledge – including nearly a quarter of a million documents and reports available to the public, searchable online[16]. Its publications cover diverse topics, and, according to the publications website, they "are primarily aimed at policy makers, development practitioners, academics and university students, and the business community"[17].

[14] All references and quotes are from the World Bank MENA report (2013), unless otherwise cited.
[15] http://www.worldbank.org/en/about
[16] http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/home
[17] http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTWBP/Resources/aboutus.html

The Opening Doors report of 2013 that will be explored herein was drafted as a regional companion for the much broader *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, which aimed to reduce female mortality, increase their educational and economic participation as well as their voice and agency, and reduce social inequality over time.[18] Given these intentions, it can be concluded that the Opening Doors report would be utilized, at least, by national governments and nongovernmental organizations accountable for implementing the Bank-funded projects that target gender in the MENA region. It drew from human development concepts, using HDI measurements to compare women's status among MENA countries and to compare the whole of MENA to other regions, concluding that the only tangible progress made towards gender equality was in health and education and some rights-based reforms underway, but much work was still to be done.

Analyzing mostly legal and cultural barriers, the report aimed to illuminate the reasons for the gender gap in the rights and access to formal job markets despite high educational achievements; a situation that is referred in the report to as the "*MENA puzzle*" (p. 12) or the "*gender equality paradox*" (p. 3). Although many fair and carefully considered arguments were included on behalf of Arab women, such as the recognition that political participation and legal justice are essential for achieving more gender equitable societies, the Opening Doors report presented these as means to an economic end, and the preferred language represented a neoliberal, income-oriented perspective that did not address historical processes or global interventions that helped create the paradox it so often references. I will now provide an overview of the major themes of the report and associated arguments, providing insight into some of the counterarguments the report obscured, followed by a brief analysis of terminology to illustrate the report's macroeconomic biases.

[18] https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4391

Education and (Un)employment:

As stated earlier, although the authors praise the advancements made in MENA regarding literacy and higher educational enrollment rates for girls and women in primary, secondary and tertiary settings over the past several decades, it lamented the low quality of education and teachers, citing these as factors of the low economic participation for women. From page 38 of the report: "*Poor school facilities, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of female teachers may have a disproportionate effect on girls' completion rates.*" This statement was presented rather briefly, and in an isolated view of the region without any additional reflection as to the cause of these alleged deficiencies. Unsurprisingly, it glossed over how public education in MENA, as in many other developing regions that have received conditional loans from IFIs such as the Bank, has suffered since roughly the end of the Cold War due to governmental budget cuts that came as a result of the conditions imposed by IFIs through their structural adjustment programs and the subsequent downsizing of the welfare state (Hoodfar, 1997; Clark, 2004; Harcourt, 2009).

There were a large number of references to generally high female unemployment rates in MENA, especially in relation to higher educational levels and in relation to men, in order to highlight the gender gap within the region and compare to the rest of the world. The dominant explanation provided was that the Arab state governments had invested too much in expanding the public sector, which was unable to keep pace with population growth and the rise in educated job seekers. It also stated that the public sector is where the highest concentration of desirable and "*gender appropriate*" (p. 38) or "*female friendly*" (p. 19) jobs for women exist, such as administrative and teaching fields. It used these descriptions of gender relevance to generalize

women's preferences in this region and to make connections to the low labor rates, without acknowledging that the public sector – as mentioned above regarding education – has been constrained by the very policies dictated by conditional financing imposed on these states by the IFIs. The report did also cite more practical reasons for women preferring government work, such as better job security, pay and working hours; yet, it repeatedly criticized the MENA governments for their unsustainable public sector hiring practices, and even criticized policies that protect citizens, such as mandatory severance packages, pointing to "*reduced...flexibility of the labor market*" (p. 105). This language is unapologetically neoliberal, as severance pay and other forms of protection or benefits for laborers run counter to the interests of capital owners. The "flexibility of the labor market" suggests that the Bank believes MENA countries should promote a flexible (i.e., easily disposable and non-unionized) workforce (Peet and Hartwick, 2015).

Cultural and Legal Barriers:

There were multiple references in the Opening Doors report to the restrictiveness of conservative and traditional gender norms, but with no mention of how authoritarian regimes and their Western support that have reinforced these ideologies in the region (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Tell, 2014); in fact, no attention was given to authoritarianism or oppressive political regimes at all. On page 10 of the report, its aim is clear: "*This report argues that the Region's conservative gender norms, its legal and institutional framework...lie at the heart of the puzzle of low rates of female participation in politics and the economy.*" Here it can be noted that the authors concluded the "puzzle" can be solved by cultural explanations, with no further probing. To give credit to the report, however, it did acknowledge that these norms are not exclusive to MENA

and are evolving along with educational and demographic changes. It also cited research that drew conclusions between the oil boom and increased gender segregation, suggesting the authors were aware of the complex political economic environment influencing gender within largely Islamic value systems, but did not contribute any further analysis.

The report included an entire chapter on legal systems in MENA countries in conjunction with the cultural values that work against women, concluding that these norms have been formalized through legal frameworks. It provided a comparison to women's struggles for legal equality in seemingly more progressive states like Greece, Spain and Ireland, stating that in the 1980s "*in each of these countries, economic growth created new opportunities for women, while the legal and institutional frameworks created flexible work options and a conducive work environment for them*" (p. 11). The aim of this comparison seems to be to highlight what the MENA region *could* be achieving. It cited examples in MENA such as labor laws that restrict women from certain industries, prioritization of government benefits for male heads of household, lax or absent punishment for domestic violence, discriminatory citizenship laws and the multitude of personal status laws that are usually enforced in courts associated with the various religious sects. It even acknowledged the colonial roots of some modern legislation and that inequality before the law is not unique to MENA. However, the authors did not go so far as to question whether the imposition of western law in Muslim majority societies was appropriate, nor did it acknowledge the gendered division of these pluralistic legal systems – i.e., how the various sects' religious laws tend to be associated with the private sphere and the European codes linked to the public sphere (Massad, 2001).

The report mentioned illiteracy and lack of awareness, especially in poor rural areas, as hindering the implementation of laws that would protect women's rights. The authors made it a

point to include the following quote from a Yemeni village woman: "*We are illiterate. We don't know what's going on. We don't know what you are talking about*" (p. 84). Abu-Lughod (2013) would caution against this tendency to assign universal notions of rights through legal frameworks, as these initiatives may attempt to oversimplify the complex circumstances that women negotiate every day. Citing her ethnographic evidence from rural Egypt, she stated that notions of rights and legal representation are often foreign concepts that have little influence on women's realities in these locations, and that even such seemingly clear-cut situations as domestic violence need to be put into context of individual bargains and choices. As Abu-Lughod's AHDR critique (2009) focused on the "dialects" of development, such as the presumed universality of rights, a brief dissection of some of the Opening Doors terminology is warranted.

Language:

While plodding through the near 200-page (cover to cover) publication, the repetitiveness of certain ideas became progressively more apparent, validating at least a cursory review of this language to illustrate how the Bank's ideological preferences were iterated in the report. Words conveying neoliberal economic concepts as well as value-laden terms that emphasize difference were aplenty. Terms that are often associated with quality of life were much less frequent; in fact, words such as *wellbeing*, *wellness*, *content* (as an adjective), *happiness, thrive* and *thriving* were nowhere to be found. *Happy* occurred just once, and was used in a quotation from a focus group of young men in Yemen about their hopes for the future: *"the boys hoped to 'get married, make my wife happy, and find a good job'"* (p. 2, Box O.1).

Refer to the chart in Figure 3 for a basic list of terms in descending order of occurrence[19] that I have assigned to two different categories: those that convey (A) impersonal, technical, taxonomic, economic and/or quantitative ideas compared to (B) those that would be associated with personal, emotional and/or qualitative ideas, and (-) other terms that are more contested within development critique are left to the reader's judgment. From observing the list, it is clear that designation (B) occurs with much less frequency than (A). The sheer magnitude of terms related to the labor market and sectors clarified that the objective of the report was primarily to recommend income-based approaches to tackling gender equality.

Keywords	**Number of Occurrences**
Labor Force (A)	173
Right/Rights (-)	87
Public Sector (A)	87
Private Sector (A)	81
Gap (A)	66
Lack (A)	50
Difference (A)	30
Statistics (A)	29
Agency (B)	22
Mobility (B)	21

[19] To avoid repetition, I did not include instances of these terms in the table of contents or in any of the references. However, I did include instances in endnotes, tables and charts.

Traditional (A)	16
Flexible, Flexibility[20] (B)	12
Behind, lag, lagged, or lagging (A)	8
Empower, empowering (-)	7
Fulfill, fulfilling (B)	6
Voice (B)	6
Aspire, aspired, aspiring (B)	6
Modern (A)	5
Shortage (A)	5
Mismatch (A)	5
Self-esteem, (self) confidence (B)	2
Dreams (B)	1
Satisfy (B)	1
Basic Needs (B)	1
Happy (B)	1
Work quality (B)	1
Capabilities (B)	1

Figure 3: Language Usage in World Bank's MENA Opening Doors Report

[20] Does not include usage in "flexibility of the labor market".

As can be seen throughout the report, the Bank's priorities aligned with the neoliberal (Washington Consensus) values, as outlined in Chapter 1. The authors made great effort to emphasize the cultural shortcomings in MENA countries, as well as the economic inefficiencies of a large public sector, which it argued was based on a "social contract"[21] that was "*no longer sustainable in its implications for fiscal health and sustainable growth*" (p. 121). The overall message served to subtly reinforce a homogenous image of Arab backwardness and authoritarianism, as if conservative ideals are universal or modern MENA governments do not have any genuine support and must bribe their citizens with jobs, subsidies and welfare benefits to gain legitimacy.

By making blanket assertions about the region without critical analysis of the past and present contexts of specific countries or social groups, this myopic band of technical experts – much like their colonial predecessors – engaged in a process of homogenization "such as to wipe out any traces of individual Arabs with narratable life histories" (Said, 1978, p. 229). The report also aligns with the "Women in Development" approach, which integrates women into allegedly progressive development iniatives and accepts western modernization as inevitable and desirable, while largely ignoring gender relations beyond facile assertions that conservative norms are constricting (Peet and Hartwick, 2015). Given the report's economistic biases, alternative perspectives that provide a wider frame of reference for women's lives and livelihoods in MENA are warranted.

[21] The Bank cites only its own publications to define its use of the term "social contract" as a situation in which institutions and members of a society are bound to and influence one another. It states that these actors "define the boundaries of acceptable policy choice, and they affect the organization of interests in society, helping to determine who wins and who loses in a given political economy" (p. 27).

Other Studies

If we buy into the Bank's narrative and insist upon addressing the gender gap in employment as the key to dismantling gender inequality, it ought to be noted that other explanations for low labor force participation of women and youth in the MENA indicate that the causes may be more complex than the Bank reported. For example, looking at political-economic reasons for women's low or invisible positions in MENA economies, Valentine Moghadam (1995) provided an analysis of the post-colonial period of state-building economic development and industrialization, drawing from studies that explore the relationship between national resources and labor participation, as well as the overarching trends in political economy of the region. She stated that industrial expansion was slow in MENA until around the mid-20th century, when oil revenues were diverted by nascent revolutionary Arab regimes for import substitution industrialization. The dominant oil industry's reliance on heavy machinery was subsequently deemed unsuitable for women's employment.

Additionally, the reliance on oil revenues made other industries insignificant in much of the region. In the oil-poor countries, governments favored large-scale agriculture and other export-oriented industries. Despite reliance on manufacturing in the non-oil economy of Jordan, for example, Moghadam cited the possibility that *de facto* state policies discouraged female employment to the advantage of men due to widespread unemployment, conditions of external debt and dependence on foreign aid. She didn't refute cultural factors as having a role, but rather stated that the political-economical determinants of class divisions, international aid and uneven industrial development must also be considered when analyzing Arab women's limited presence in the formal economy.

In an analysis of a 1982-83 manpower survey in Jordan, Hussein Shakhatreh (1995) concluded that many factors were contributing to low labor force participation of women in the country. He also stated that Jordanian women's high educational attainment rates and low labor rates suggested they have been excluded from development. In his study, the important factors that pointed to better chances for economic participation (other than education) were: urban residence, single or divorced/widowed status, absence of young children in household, and the availability of cheap or free childcare. These factors implied that barriers to women joining the workforce are not as simple as cultural values or unsustainable allocation of government resources to the public sector, as the Opening Doors report suggested, but rather point to practical barriers caused by structural deficiencies, geographic distance from opportunities, and a lack of political willingness to support women's employment.

The Opening Doors report did address how household responsibilities are often a hindrance to women joining the formal workforce and that there is a significant gender gap in household chores and childcare responsibilities, illustrating with statistics from Iraq and Morocco that married women spend significantly more time than unmarried women or men performing these crucial reproductive activities. However, it did not address how something as practical as government-subsidized childcare, as Shakhatreh suggested, could improve women's employment opportunities, as this would be contradictory to the Bank's pro-market narrative. Moghadam and Shakhatreh, acting as policy advocates, provided tangible explanations for Arab women's low employment rates, but it should be noted that they were still contributing to a framework that assumes economic activity in a state's formal sector is necessary for gender equality in Arab society.

It is also important to contextualize the research put forth by the Bank: in the *Acknowledgements* section of the Opening Doors report, the team that contributed to its publication was listed by name and title, and it could be observed that all but one person in the core team and group of consultants were economists. In a compilation entitled *Adventures in Aidland*, David Mosse (2011) and other anthropologists provided a valuable critique of the structures of international development. In particular, in his ethnography of the World Bank, Mosse discovered that anthropologists working within the organization had to make sacrifices in order to build support among networks, which had a tendency to make their qualitative scholarship more economistic when they adopted and promoted buzzwords like *social capital*, for example. Similarly, geographer Anthony Bebbington (et al., 2004), a former Bank consultant, likewise implored us to consider the bureaucratic limitations and internal alliances that promote or block ideas presented in the Bank's research, as well as the different languages and divergent preferences between the operational and policy/research staff. He advised that the internal tensions and outside pressures ensure that political and power-structure debates will be tempered by the institution before publication, as critiques of governments can cause complications for Bank staff working in those regions. Nevertheless, Bebbington assured us that qualitative, contextual language and ideas are not missing altogether from the institution's lexicon and inner dialogues.

Conclusion

Much like Abu-Lughod's conclusion that the AHDR 2005 report was simply reiterating western assumptions of modernity and neoliberalism, the Opening Doors report was a similarly normative device that also demonstrated the Bank's attempt at being apolitical and technocratic

through its arguments and language choices, necessarily avoiding mention of its role in creating the conditions that constrain women in these countries. More political analyses are thus necessary, as was evidenced by Abu-Lughod, Moghadam and Shakhatreh. However, as Bebbington and others (2004) pointed out, the more political and socioculturally-aware research being conducted under the auspices of the Bank has to contend with a complex interior bureaucracy and an organizational preference of economic theories that are deeply entrenched and underscore its mission statement. When critiquing the Bank's neoliberal bent, we must also recognize that there has been some progress, however slow, in developing its agenda to include more comprehensive concepts such as HDI and the recognition that women in MENA deserve more political voice. In the next chapter, I will delve further into sociological, anthropological and political science research of women in MENA to argue that state-level data and development assessments are inappropriate, given the significance of the informal economy, charitable and social networks in the region, and other challenges to implementing economic development initiatives.

Chapter 4

Alternative Work and Coping Mechanisms of Women in MENA

Introduction

In the last half-century, dominant development thinking has shifted beyond mere modernization approaches – in which national income growth is seen as the correct path for allegedly backward or traditional countries (McDowell and Sharp, 1999) – to the more inclusive Human Development Index (HDI) that captures qualitative aspects such as life expectancy and education levels. In spite of this, there is still a desire within development agencies to measure and compare human achievement by country. Notably, the taxonomic differentiation of states based on *developed* and *underdeveloped/developing* is still pervasive in political and economic doctrine, yet it is difficult to understand how these designations are relevant to people when there is inequality at every scale. For example, we find poorer individuals living in developed nations who are deprived of opportunities and services, and citizens in developing countries who enjoy extraordinary wealth and privilege. When we notice this injustice, it becomes hard to ignore and deserves a closer look to determine how some of these taxonomies came to be.

In this chapter, I will explore the origins of state-level economic data to argue that the discipline of economics and its methodologies are biased against women and that mainstream development policies to increase their formal labor force participation based on these data are inappropriate in both rural and urban contexts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Due to the harm caused by neoliberal ideology that I will explore here, I argue that more diverse, qualitative research is needed for effective development intervention. In particular, I assert that the presence of informal sector work and social networks in MENA, as coping

mechanisms, reflects the failure of western economic models. Using research performed independently of the major development institutions, I will show that the pro-market, pro-private sector values in mainstream development are at odds with the complex social, political and economic environments that constrain and define the lives of women living in the MENA region today.

The Problems with National Data

Reflecting on conceptions of modernity, Timothy Mitchell (2000) asserted that national income accounting is only an invention of the last century, yet governments' fetishistic devotion to these statistics would make them seem timeless. This type of record-keeping, he argued, is a way of representing humans symbolically and numerically, making it possible to compare and categorize nations while simultaneously portraying the objects being represented as if they were fixed in space and time. It must be remembered, however, that these seductive representations ultimately reflect *us*: the collective output of our energies and the labors of daily life. The purpose of these measurements, however, was not to assess the benefits of labor for the laborers' sake.

In the 1970s and 80s, New Zealand politician and feminist economist Marilyn Waring (1988) began to question the validity of macroeconomic statistics, stating that these measurements are the "beguiling propaganda" (p. 45) of a professional system that is inherently biased towards its creators: educated men from the West. Based on the masculine and European origins of economics as a scientific discipline, she lamented that the definition of a state labor force includes only "the employed and unemployed" and "not the underemployed, the marginally employed, the would-be employed, and certainly not those who work in the informal

sector or who work as housewives" (p. 27). As such, economically intangible activities that are usually associated with women have no *value* and are not considered *productive* within this system. The rigid focus on numbers and the seemingly unbiased nature of empiricism and the scientific method, she argued, has "colonized" not just the cultures and value systems of developing world, but *all* women and children as well due to the perceived fruitlessness of their contributions (1988, p. 40).

At the heart of modern economics, and by extension development practice, is the UN System of National Accounts (UNSNA), which Waring asserted is among "the most vicious tools of colonization" (p. 49). She revealed that this system, which has since been naturalized by most state governments trying to get a handle on the economic activity that takes place within their boundaries, was ultimately the product of 1930s-40s economic research in Britain (culminating in a 1953 report) to assess how the country would pay for war. From its design, Waring discovered that this system prioritized spending and accounting on behalf of Britain's role in World War II, while it subordinated the wellbeing of its people. Despite recognition among some economists that national income growth could not illustrate internal conditions of poverty or inequality, she declared that this system became "even more entrenched in the intervening decades" (p. 58).

Waring argued that these statistics, as they are based largely upon censuses, ought to be revamped to capture women's labor and time. Her critique is significant to gender analyses of development, as the UNSNA has been used in a mostly uncritical fashion to identify, design and evaluate economic interventions. In view of the fact that MENA countries often lack in capacity for measuring these data (Anker and Anker, 1995; World Bank, 2013), and because Arab women

are economically and socially less visible than men, this can lead to locally inappropriate or incomplete policy.

Time, however, is a fixed factor of all economic activity that does not discriminate by gender: Waring argued that the data used to build these statistics ought to at least include time budgets, since a complete overhaul of national accounting is unlikely. These budgets would provide a much more accurate depiction of women's work because they are organized around the constant measurement of time, and eliminate some of the points of exclusion (such as economic terms) in traditional surveys that are framed around productive employment. She also argued they would not be additionally burdensome given the complexity of existing household budget surveys she had analyzed (Waring, 1988; Nash and Martin, 1995).

Several studies specific to the MENA region have uncovered the inadequacy of survey techniques and provided suggestions in line with Waring's, concluding that the data on Arab women and their economic activity are indeed inaccurate. In the early 1990s, economist Richard Anker and statistician Martha Anker analyzed interview methods from a rural Egyptian census to determine why female labor force participation was chronically low, when earlier research in the 1980s had shown it to be higher. After observing trends that linked answers to respondents' lack of understanding of the economic terms used in the survey, Anker and Anker suggested that with proper definition of "labor force" and "work", much ambiguity could be eliminated. They also suggested that with specific daily activities listed in questionnaires for respondents to choose from and more probing interview methods, more accurate data could be collected – i.e., secondary activities that the interviewees may not consider "work" but which contribute to a family farm or business.

More recently in Egypt, sociologists Ray Langsten and Rania Salem (2008) analyzed two different types of surveys used on the same women to determine their actual productivity, as opposed to strictly labor force participation. They concluded that activity logs, instead of keyword questionnaires, uncovered many hidden tasks that could be considered work, but which are not recognized as such on a national or international level. Their findings harmonized with that of Anker and Anker (1995), and both studies provided concrete evidence of the gendered division of labor, the underestimation of women's work in censuses, as well as differences in understanding economic concepts among women of different backgrounds and education levels due to the bias of such terminology towards what is traditionally men's work: stable, productive, remunerated and market-oriented employment (Benería, 1981; Waring, 1988). However, if one were looking for highest accuracy, advanced survey methods such as the activity logs mentioned earlier would not necessarily accomplish this, as tasks often overlap, are overlooked, or may be split between individuals (MacDonald, 1995).

These shortfalls in data collection, which Waring demonstrated are not limited to the developing world when she analyzed New Zealand and Canada, imply that state reporting mechanisms may not be meeting the UNSNA international reporting standards, providing deflated accounts of women's work. Feminist economist Lourdes Benería (1981), like Waring, also stated that this obsession with market-based economics obscures the actual labor of women in developing countries, and is representative of sexist attitudes that value remunerated work over women's work, which is often unremunerated. In rural areas where women spend much of their time laboring and multitasking between productive and reproductive activities that do not earn them a place within the labor force, disaggregating these tasks would be difficult. This challenge suggests that the undervaluation of women's work may not be completely attributable

to its lower status, but that capturing these data is logistically cumbersome in a system that was designed to measure mostly men's work (Benería, 1981 and 1997; Waring, 1988).

Given that domestic labor is overwhelmingly women's work across the globe, Benería and Waring also argued that collecting good data on women's production is crucial to prevent their double-burden of labor. Benería even called for development policies, regardless of scale, to consider women's double-work, suggesting that planning has fallen short of benefiting half of the world's population because of ideological barriers and functional inconveniences. Population expert Huda Zurayk (1985) also echoed Benería's call for governments to more accurately capture "the type and extent of the existing economic contribution of all members of society" (p. 45). She claimed that without this, they couldn't claim to meet their development goals.

Because mainstream development policies often advocate for technical solutions (Li, 2005) such as women's formal inclusion in the workforce, they may be inappropriate when so much economic production in the developing world takes place outside of the formal market (but, ironically, often takes place in an *actual* market). This is certainly the case in MENA: its history of state-led development and subsequent rapid market liberalization has created the perfect conditions for Arab women and men to sidestep formal employment and state welfare institutions just to survive. Given the invisibility of this process, a smaller-scale glance at social conditions and microeconomic motivations is warranted to understand the concepts that macro-level statistics cannot explain.

Ideological Biases and Informal Economies

Returning to the basic aims of economic development, the allegedly universal goal of personal freedoms and wealth accumulation may not align with values held by women outside of

the West. Abu-Lughod (2013) cited examples of women in rural Egypt who did not ascribe to western feminist ideals of individuality and self-reliance, factors that are integral to women joining the formal workforce. From her ethnographic research, she demonstrated that it is inaccurate to assume all Arab women desire the life of a western woman. In fact, some women in these remote rural villages weren't aware of women's rights discourses that had emerged among Egyptian feminist groups, insinuating there is an urban bias to these ideals within this Arab nation. Other anthropological research provides insight into the ways in which women decide (or are forced) to support themselves and their families.

In her ethnography of working class urban households in Cairo, Homa Hoodfar (1997) discovered women had many different coping mechanisms in response to Egypt's late-20th century period of market liberalization and economic privatization under president Anwar Sadat (*Infitah*, or Open Door Policy), structural adjustment programs and the mass emigration of men to the oil producing countries in the Arabian Peninsula. She noted that rapid growth and rural-urban migration had shifted the cultural landscape of the city, resulting in many women living far from their families or other close social networks. At the same time, the private sector and state had not provided any significant solution to alleviate these "special circumstances" (p. 126).

Under these conditions, Hoodfar witnessed the diversification and multitasking of women's income-earning activities in the urban settings, much like what Benería discussed regarding rural areas. Many women she encountered did work in formal employment, preferring the flexibility, stability and respectable nature of government jobs such as teaching and administration. However, wages stagnated and the Egyptian public sector continued to contract during the period of Hoodfar's study due to the *Infitah* policies and the erosion of state services due to structural adjustment programs implemented while the country sought debt relief.

Given these conditions, it became increasingly practical and necessary for these women to engage in informal income-earning activities. In her target communities, Hoodfar noted that local markets had a high female presence, and that trading in food and textiles was a common option that allowed them to remain close to home, whereas factory employment would necessitate spending money and time arranging for childcare and transportation in the rapidly developing and congested city. Thus, the "petty production" (p. 129) that Hoodfar encountered in working-class neighborhoods of Cairo was a pragmatic alternative to external employment.

Working for a husband's business was also considered suitable for women in these lower income areas, although many women did not consider themselves to be "working" when they contributed in that capacity. In many cases, their informally earned income was not discussed with husbands, due to a common perception among these women that men had "sticky fingers" for their wives' meager earnings (p. 129). Because of this, some women relied on one another to help out with their small businesses instead of involving the husbands, despite the women's reportedly obligatory contribution to their husbands' businesses.

The expansion of these Cairene women's trust and cooperation outside of the nuclear family suggests that stereotypes of the cloistered Arab woman, as well as generalizations about household cohesion that are common in economic theories, ought to be reconsidered. Additionally, welfare of the family unit is not necessarily the primary determinant of women's economic decisions and survival strategies (Wolf, 1997). Hoodfar's study was crucial to understanding the complexity and variety of individual interests, bargains and strategies in women's lives based on qualitative research at the household and neighborhood level. It also demonstrated that formal employment might be impractical for many women in developing countries, suggesting that this common development goal might never be attainable until these

barriers, including the gendered division of labor that exists to varying degrees in every country, are tackled.

A more methodical approach to researching Arab women's informal employment arrived in the first decade of the 21st century, where entrepreneurial experts Haya Al-Dajani and Susan Marlow (2013) explored the empowerment potential of handicraft, "heritage-based" (p. 518) microenterprise among displaced Palestinian women in Jordan, minus the fetishizing that often accompanies such advocacy. To assess the factors of empowerment that are harder to judge than simply economic profits, Al-Dajani compiled "potentially measurable" (p. 514) indicators of female empowerment into a collective framework that highlighted seven outcomes that are crucial for undertaking entrepreneurial activity. These were: "increased awareness and knowledge, accountability and responsibility, making decisions and having choices, leadership, self-identity, reduced poverty and economic establishment" (p. 514).

The positive outcomes of their longitudinal study (1999 to 2009) suggested that it is possible to preserve indigenous knowledge and talent while improving the status and circumstances of marginalized women such as migrants and refugees, as the participants expressed the benefits of this entrepreneurship throughout the study in a way that was personal, experiential, and meaningful to them. In some cases, the women reported they had earned the respect of their husbands who acknowledged the family circumstances would be much worse off without the income from their wives' embroidery work. Thus, such research suggests that livelihood options in the home-based informal sector may be practical and culturally appropriate alternatives to formal sector jobs for Arab women, the benefits of which are measurable in a qualitative way that is more relatable and personal than sterile statistics reflecting macroeconomic growth.

Al-Dajani and Marlow, however, were careful to note that these enterprise activities had a limited ability to disrupt or overcome the existing patriarchal structures, or the state structures and attitudes that disadvantaged these women who were in an additionally subordinated position as displaced people within a host society. Despite its potential to increase women's agency within the household and community, informal work performed by either gender lacks the protection benefits and income security of (some, but not all) formal jobs, and for women, lacks the capacity to challenge the gender hierarchy that relegated them to the market's margins in the first place (Kabeer et al., 2013). At these smaller scales in the MENA region, however, we also witness alternative institutions and networks that have been created to protect against the uncertainty of informal work and alleviate difficult economic circumstances.

Savings Groups, Reciprocity and Social Networks

Some of the key outcomes of several Arab states' debt relief in the latter half of the 20th century were the structural adjustment policies enforced by international financial institutions: namely, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Requiring massive restructuring of economies that had been shaped through state-led development, the observable effects within the household were decreased wages, rising prices of goods and services, and the removal or downgrading of the government's provision of social welfare, including healthcare, education and food subsidies (Hoodfar, 1997; Clark, 2004). Because these responsibilities are often provided or organized within households by the women in any society, the disintegration of such safety nets has affected them disproportionately, eventually necessitating other arrangements that stand in for welfare or banking structures to meet basic needs.

A particularly visible impact of poverty, which was created or exacerbated in some MENA households by the aforementioned restructuring, is a lack of income and thus less cash to spend on basic needs. Additionally, one of the persistent gaps in the developing world that signals gender inequality, and sometimes statutory discrimination, is many women's inability to access credit and formal loans (Kabeer, 2016) to start businesses, buy necessary household items or invest in their children's education. Based on these deficiencies and the lack of formal options to improve these circumstances, other avenues have become increasingly important in Arab societies.

In Hoodfar's Cairo study, she witnessed the potential of the *gam'iyat*, or savings clubs, to meet women's household spending needs, acting as "an effective parallel banking system" (p. 218). The primary force driving these informal networks is that of *reciprocity* and the expectation of future interaction with those who provided the support. Structured solely on social relationships and cohesion among members of a homogenous ethnic and socioeconomic group of women, the pressure and personal or familial reputation tied to meeting debt obligations within these circles were noted by Hoodfar as effective means of achieving cooperation. She also noted, however, that the changing demographic makeup of Cairene neighborhoods was weakening these groups, indicating that a relatively homogenous cultural or class identity is a key contributor to the success of such reciprocal transactions, thus suggesting that savings groups that transcend these identity boundaries may not be as effective.

Other economic coping mechanisms that act as alternatives to state welfare in the Arab world are the multitude of indigenous non-governmental organizations that claim to operate based on Islamic values, which political scientist, Janine A. Clark (2004), termed *Islamic social institutions*, or ISIs. In a comprehensive study of ISIs in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, Clark

determined that many of these organizations did in fact provide necessary services at cheaper (or free) costs to the poor, as well as contributed to building solidarity and identity among the women and men who were volunteers or employees of these organizations. Among the institutions she explored were Islamic medical clinics in Cairo, a large umbrella organization in Jordan that coordinates education, social and health services for its citizens, and a Yemeni women's network associated with *Islah,* a popular Islamic political alliance.

Analyzing the composition and leadership of these ISIs, as well as the benefits and attitudes towards them, Clark refuted prior research on social movements in the region that assumed such institutions mobilize the lower classes into participating in Islamist causes. Instead, she asserted that the mostly educated, urban and middle-class membership of these networks frequently excluded the poor due to social links that were strong within classes and weak across them, and that many of the services provided were disproportionately beneficial to the middle class communities. For example, in Egypt and Jordan, cost-prohibitive medical services were largely located in wealthier neighborhoods that were inaccessible to the poor.

The ISIs studied by Clark were founded according to and operating under Islamic principles of charity and a united Muslim community, although the commercialization of some were highly controversial, such as how the Islamic Hospital in Jordan that provides services too costly for the poor is often referred to as "Commercial Hospital" or "Criminal Hospital" (p. 113). Despite the potential for ISIs to improve solidarity among their educated middle class constituencies and their necessary role – however nominal – in filling the gaps where economic restructuring in much of the MENA region had hindered state welfare provision, Clark argued that they were not an appropriate substitute for the state itself. This would support an argument for basic needs provision and strengthening Arab governmental institutions as a part of

comprehensive development programs instead of relying on neoliberal assumptions of free market efficiency or placing a disproportionate burden on the local civil society and non-governmental organizations to provide for those in need. The existence of these ISIs as charitable institutions, as well as their privileges that exclude many they claim to benefit, demonstrate clearly that the poor, and especially poor women to whom welfare services are crucial, are perpetually left behind.

Conclusion

From its inception, the bulk gathering of economic data for national and international purposes has been biased against women or any laborer who does not generate an income or interact directly with the formal "market". In part, this is due to the epistemological supremacy of economics as a scientific discipline and its masculine (and masculinist) origins, where women and other non-producers have been left out of the equation. As Waring, Benería and others demonstrated through a feminist economist lens, the undervaluation of women's work in national and global measurements is the byproduct of a sexism that is international, not confined to MENA, and demonstrates the difficulty of capturing the nuances of labor that is not directly profitable or widely recognized as "work". Practical solutions would be to expand upon traditional notions of work through the use of activity-based time logs or more detailed questionnaires during census taking; however, these measures are still subject to misunderstanding and bias.

The danger lies in the preeminence of conventional measurements: development and economic policymakers justify their interventions based on these data, despite the fact that women's labor isn't represented because they are preoccupied with ensuring basic survival and

reproduction of their households under increasingly deprived conditions. As demonstrated by qualitative studies in rural and urban Arab societies, the importance of coping strategies like informal sector work and social networks should not be ignored in development policy in a region like MENA, where the prevalence of these strategies signals the failure of applying western economic (neoliberal/conventional) policy prescriptions. In addition, practical hindrances to formal employment for many women may belie the assumption that their low economic participation rate is mostly a cultural or religious phenomenon. However, women's unequal exposure to these barriers due to assumptions of domestic responsibilities does suggest gender discrimination, though it is important to note that this is not limited to MENA or even the developing world.

The social networks, survival tactics and entrepreneurial activities explored above might indeed offer relief for Arab women in dire circumstances. Unfortunately, there is limited potential for these options to help them transform patriarchal gender roles, both within the household and in the communities where their status is also constrained by myriad intersectional identities – such as religion, class, education, location, citizenship, marital status and age – that can only be discerned through painstaking sociological study. Thus, it is incomplete and inappropriate to design development interventions for women based largely on macroeconomic indicators (that were never meant to benefit or represent them in the first place) and western assumptions of progress without considering the particular circumstances, politics or the diversity of values and personal interests that shape their daily lives.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Whenever we view other cultures and the differences therein, it is perhaps natural to blame any observed faults on characteristics that do not resonate with our own experiences. Religion is often an easy target because it is so integral to the spoken and unspoken rules governing daily life for such a large portion of humanity. However, our collective western amnesia and unwillingness to see other factors like the long-term negative consequences of historic events that people similar to us perpetrated generations ago (with weak justification) are difficult things to accept.

When all you know is a culture built upon principles of rugged individualism, it is hard to imagine a life where the welfare and reputation of your family supersede your own interests and dreams. When you are accustomed to sexual freedom and a relatively liberal dress code that evolved from decades of social struggle, it is difficult to picture being part of a society where those aspects may not be desired by all. I am not stating that a rural Arab/Muslim woman will always reject western influences in favor of her own belief system and familiar practices; rather, I assert that her choice should be as authentic as possible to her personal and cultural preferences and values and that we as outsiders must heed and respect the complexities that constrain decisionmaking in any location or social context.

The problems magnify when we make choices on behalf of others. With colonialism, the choices made by European officials resulted in the erosion of indigenous people's choices and opportunities. Transforming their educational systems, creating specific depictions of women in Arab society and obscuring the injustices of imperialism through the takeover of Middle Eastern

historiography were prime examples of this. When the European colonial presence exacerbated the public-private separation between genders, the decision-making capabilities for women became even more limited, which fixed the image of the Arab woman in the western mind as helpless and in need of salvation. As discursive prejudices against Arabs based on these ideas made their way over time into political and economic conversations, they became perhaps less overt, but no less harmful.

Despite the aim in modern development to overcome objectively negative conditions like poverty and inequality, the whole package (ideas and praxis) has been definitively one-sided. As in the period of European colonialism, these processes are also motivated by misunderstandings and unease about cultural identities out of step with an imagined global mainstream. It is also important to recognize that none of this is accidental: the reason western values became dominant in the first place was by muting other identities through manifest and abstract processes. This, however, remains an uncomfortable and controversial topic when the focus is firmly fixed upon feel-good concepts like empowerment, prosperity, equality and rights.

In this thesis, I presented the different representations of western imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and how they have changed shape over time. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the colonial era's impacts on knowledge creation/dissemination and Arab gender relations. I also looked at the persistence of colonial (reductionist) attitudes towards Arab women in modern development discourse, as presented in Abu-Lughod's scholarship, among others. In Chapter 3, I performed my own empirical investigation of a recent World Bank report based on Abu-Lughod's model, demonstrating that the focus on culture and religion is indeed a common theme; as is the tendency to ignore any western role in creating the conditions the development institutions hope to correct. My discourse analysis also demonstrated the extreme

economistic bias in mainstream development. Lastly, in Chapter 4, I employed a feminist analysis to argue that economics, as the main academic/scientific discipline that influences development discourse and policy, is inherently biased against women and is therefore inappropriate for intervention without including more nuanced, qualitative research. When we look at some of these studies, however, it becomes clear that western economic policies have not served MENA well.

The potential solutions for poverty and gender inequality are as multifaceted as the causes, yet the preferred method of tackling these issues is based upon a narrow worldview informed largely by a rehashed, nearsighted economic theory. The language presented in documents such as the Arab Human Development Report of 2005 and the Opening Doors report hides behind a veil of technical objectivity. By asserting the causes of Arab women's low rank in both economy and society as rooted in imprudent state expenditures and traditional cultural values, the authors, as technical experts in only one subset of the social sciences, have reinvented and reinforced the ahistorical and apolitical stance of their imperial forefathers.

Because it originated from the scientific postulates of conventional economics, development at its core has addressed the needs of the state economy first, with the assumption that the benefits of national wealth will positively affect everyone in a society. However, certain bumps in the road have made the daily reality much less sunny: in developing countries, economic restructuring at the behest of the IMF and World Bank has created basic human needs deprivations with debtor nations on multiple continents struggling to implement market liberalization measures and repay their compounding loans (Kabeer et al., 2016). Despite proof of the social disadvantages to neoliberalism, free market values are still being pushed quite

unapologetically by the orthodox international financial institutions, as was demonstrated in the recent Opening Doors report.

With neoliberalism comes the power of "the market". Compared to tangible experiences in day-to-day life, such as the transactions between small numbers of geographically proximate people in a physical market, the "market" – as it is imagined at both the national and global level – is quite the abstraction indeed. If it is so foreign and irrelevant to our immediate experiences, why does it hold so much sway over our governments? Is it simply another way for those who hold power to remain detached and deflect blame for actions and systems they meddle in that cause harm? Is it really an appropriate tool for determining the allocation of resources that either enable or obstruct the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment?

Although it is not my intent to indiscriminately condemn capitalism, the discipline of economics or the development industry as a whole, I do mean to pose the above questions in a serious way in relation to the MENA region and its inhabitants, as I am not convinced that the market is the best solution. Nor am I convinced that recommendations leading to market interventions are appropriate for women without helping meet their basic needs, or without considerable structural changes that reorganize gender roles to alleviate some of their traditional burdens. Not once did the Opening Doors report suggest men in the Arab world could help women in childcare or household duties, yet as we could see in the Cairo ethnography and in other studies, such constraints contribute to the infamously low labor force rate among women in the Arab world. However, these factors are rarely considered in economists' accounts because they do not have direct ties to the market.

There is also a prevailing belief in the development industry that economic empowerment is a prerequisite for gender equality. Although equality certainly requires equal opportunity,

many individuals throughout the world can probably recall a moment when they were miserable in a certain career and did not feel particularly empowered. Abu-Lughod (2009) likewise reminded us that "employment is not by its nature liberating" (p. 89), a sentiment that was iterated extensively, much to my surprise, in the Human Development Report of 2015 (UNDP). There is perhaps some evidence that the script is changing, after all.

Work is not simply income: it does not require an exchange of money, an office, or a factory to be a fruitful way to spend one's time or seek meaning in life. Although money is a necessary tool of survival at present, it does not mean we should depreciate the value of unremunerated work that is reproducing households and societies, because this labor is truly crucial for sustaining humanity (Waring, 1988). When viewed from this perspective, "women's work" becomes much more impressive than many economists would have you think; it could even be a respectable position for which both genders compete in the future. To gain these alternative viewpoints, the narratives and experiences of women all over the world are crucial for trying to grasp the complex interactions between gender, identity, economy, politics and society; the MENA region is no exception.

In the conclusion of *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*, Abu-Lughod (2013) advised that we "take time to listen" before jumping into action on behalf of these women (p. 202). However, it is not difficult to see why this approach would be unfavorable to policymakers: qualitative research doesn't make a solid case for intervention in this world still dominated by quantitative methods that are incapable of expressing the variations among people living in the Arab world. Much of the reductionism of Arab women has been conflated with Islam and Arab racial heritage (Abu-Lughod, 2009); however, it should be noted that not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are devout. In fact, not all Arabs are Arabs: a multitude of ethnicities and heritages

undergird modern societies in the MENA region, but mentioning Kurds or Nubians or Berbers in development documents, for example, would be counterproductive to the policy goals and politically controversial in the target countries.

It is clear that the complexities of modern societies would become muddled in the limited scope of development policies, but there is potential for improvement. There is a need to bridge the gap between conceptual feminist and postcolonial theories and mainstream development discourse and activities, putting into action intellectuals' calls for more radical change by clearing space on the podium for non-western voices (McEwan, 2008). Unfortunately, as Abu-Lughod demonstrated with her critique of the AHDR 2005 report, even these more inclusive viewpoints may be coming from a position of privilege and western bias, suggesting that the epistemological legacies of colonialism may never fully disappear.

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