

Reham El Morally

Women and Politics in the Middle East through a Marxist Feminist Lens

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Silent: By choice or Force?

Women and Politics in the Middle East through A Marxist Feminist Lens

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Abstract: The hierarchical social relations inherent to any patriarchal system have resulted in women's social identities becoming dependent on their relationship with men, as fathers or husbands.¹ Such relationships have encouraged the view that the oppression of women is the cornerstone of such systems and that their liberation is an essential condition for overcoming it.² My question for this paper is: What is the relationship between patriarchy and women's marginalization and absence in the political sphere? In this paper I will discuss how women are marginalized and silenced by force rather than by choice. To further elaborate on that it must be clear that women, especially in the Middle East, are constrained by different types of patriarchy. They are restrained from growing and aspiring to change power relations by the legal system, by the social conventions and the unequal power relations between male and female, and lastly by externalities that constructed the polity of the region. In order to further carry out this research paper, I will use a Marxist feminist theoretical framework to analyze the issue of women's marginalization in the Middle East.

Keywords: *Women, Middle East, Feminism, Patriarchy, feminist identity, Women's marginalization, public policy, culture of silence*

¹ Margaret Helou, "Women and Parliamentary Elections in Lebanon", in Hussein Abu Rumman (ed), Arab Women and Political Participation, (Amman: al-Urdon al-Jadid Research Centre, 2000).^[1]

² Hisham Sharabi, "Neopatriarchy: Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society". (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

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I. INTRODUCTION

“You know who’s against democracy in the Middle East? The husbands. They got used to their way of life. Now the Traditional way of life must change. If you don’t give equal rights to women, you can’t progress”

~ Shimon Peres

“Feminism has never been about giving a job to women. It’s about making life [more] fair for women everywhere. It’s not about a piece of the existing pie; it’s about baking a new pie”

~ Gloria Steinem

These two quotes highlight the core of my paper. It will not talk about democracy as much as it will be discussing the role of women in the Middle East and how patriarchy heavily exists in the public sphere in the Middle East. Like Steinem’s quote, it’s not about adding women to the bowl of cake mix and stirring, it’s about creating a completely new cake mix that gives women equal chances and opportunities. The challenges Arab woman face with respect to political participation are, numerous and are often interconnected. The list is endless. Many of these obstacles stem from the patriarchal nature of society, in addition to being the major force within family structures. Although there are myriad differences between the Arab countries in the political and economic realms, patriarchy seems to be a common feature. The hierarchical social relations inherent to any patriarchal system have resulted in women’s social identities becoming dependent on their relationship with men, as a fathers or husbands.³ Such relationships have encouraged the view that the oppression of women is the cornerstone of such systems and that their liberation is an essential condition for overcoming it.⁴

My question for this paper is: What is the relationship between patriarchy and women’s marginalization and absence in the political sphere? In this paper I will discuss how women are marginalized and silenced by force rather than by choice. To further elaborate on that it must be clear that women, especially in the Middle East, are constrained

³ Margaret Helou, “Women and Parliamentary Elections in Lebanon”, in Hussein Abu Rumman (ed), Arab Women and Political Participation, (Amman: al-Urdon al-Jadid Research Centre, 2000).^[1]

⁴ Hisham Sharabi, “Neopatriarchy: Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society”. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

by different types of patriarchy. They are restrained from growing and aspiring to change power relations by the legal system, by the social conventions and the unequal power relations between male and female, and lastly by externalities that constructed the polity of the region. In order to further carry out this research paper, I will use a Marxist feminist theoretical framework to analyze the issue of women's marginalization in the Middle East.

In order for my readers to grasp a better understanding of my research paper, I will start by providing a list of definitions. In this reading I will not use the word "empowerment" since it is a liberal discourse, which illustrates that one party has power and another party lacks power. Therefore I will use the word "power struggle" to stress on the didactical relationship between different parties. To clear any confusion, the difference between sex and gender should be identified. Sex is the biological attribution that differs men from women. Gender on the other hand is a set of socially constructed characteristics that govern the interaction between sexes; men and women (Kothari, 2002).⁵

There are multiple definitions of feminism. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) defines feminism as "The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes" (UN Women, 2014).⁶ Another definition is "[Feminism] describes a culture in which women, because they are women, are treated differently than men, and that, in that difference of treatment, women are at a disadvantage; feminism assumes that such treatment is cultural and thus possible to change" (Lewis, 2015).⁷ I prefer the first definition because it is straightforward and because it does not advocate or share the blame of women's unequal relationship to men, as a culturally bound factor. The second definition assumes that some cultures treat women as equal forces to men while other cultures don't, which is not the case.

Defining what I mean by Marxist feminism is also important for the comprehension of this paper. Marxist feminism is an emancipatory, critical framework that aims at understanding and explaining gender oppression in a systematic way (Holmstrom, 1981).⁸

⁵ Uma Kothari, 2002, "Feminist and Postcolonial Challenges to Development", in *Critical Perspectives in Development Theory and Practice*, ed. Kothari, U. & Minogue, M, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002): 35-51.

⁶ UN Women, 2014, "Emma Watson: Gender equality is your issue too", *Herforshe.org*. UN Women, 2014, www.herforshe.org, accessed 15th April 2015.

⁷ Jona Lweis, "What is Feminism?", About.com, February 2015, www.womenshistory.about.com, accessed 15th April 2015.

⁸ Nancy Holmstrom, "Women's Work, the Family and Capitalism", *Science and Society*, issue no. 45 (1981).

While there are multiple feminisms (e.g. radical feminism and liberal feminism) I see that Marxist feminism is the one with the least amount of fallacies, in addition to it being the most critical. According to Martha Gimenez, Marxist feminism, also referred to as critical or material feminism, is “A theoretical position held by relatively few feminists, who sought to develop the potential of Marxist theory to understand the capitalist sources of the oppression of women” (Gimenez, 1998).⁹ I have chosen a Marxist feminist framework of analysis because first, liberal and radical feminists ignored the class inequality and the economic realities of women’s lives (Holmstrom, 1981). Second, radical feminist analysis of patriarchy is not sufficiently historical, meaning that it ignores historical and material attributions that have led to the patriarchal attitude.

I have specifically chosen to use a Marxist feminist approach because it is “[an] emancipatory tradition of social theory built around the critical analysis of particular forms of oppression – class oppression and gender oppression respectively – rather than as well-bounded, integrated explanatory theories” (Wright, 1994).¹⁰ In other words, feminist Marxist lenses do not approach women as a separate entity that is not affected by other forces like class relations, economic power relations, and stability, rather that it explores all factors that may contribute to the oppression of women.

Furthermore Marxist feminism “it argues that society is fundamentally constructed of the relations people form as they do make things needed to survive humanly. Work is a social process of shaping and transforming the material social worlds, creating people as social beings as they create value” (McKinnon, 1982).¹¹ In other words, Marxist feminism recognizes the socially constructed gender roles that govern the relationship between men and women in the public sphere, as well as that those roles are ascribed values according to the capitalist definition of value; labor time.

Moreover my admiration of Marxist feminism lies within its acknowledgement that women do not see men as the “enemy” rather that it believes that men and women have to work together to “overthrow the Capitalist system of economic exploitation”.¹²

⁹ Martha Gimenez, “Marxist Feminism/Materialist Feminism”, (USA: Virginia Tech University, 1998).

¹⁰ Erik Wright, Explanation and Emancipation in Marxism and Feminism, in *Interrogating Inequality: Essay on Class Analysis, Socialism, and Marxism*, (London: Verso, 1994): 1-12.

¹¹ Cathrine A. McKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory”, *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 3, *Feminist Theory*, (Spring, 1982): 515-544.

¹² Naomi Byrone, “What is Marxism”, *Marxism*, Socialist Party, 2011, www.marxism.org.uk/pack/history.html. (accessed April 28, 2015).

Furthermore, Marxist feminists see that patriarchy is an ideology (a set of related beliefs about the world - in this instance, male - female relationships) that stems from male attempts to justify the economic exploitation of women. Additionally the approach concedes that the "family system" characteristic of modern societies benefits capitalism (and, by extension, the men who tend to dominate positions of power and influence).¹³

Those characteristics of Marxist feminism help me to highlight the aim of this paper, which is providing enough evidence that patriarchy is the main reason behind women's absence of the political and public spheres in the Middle East.

This paper will be divided into three main parts. Part one will discuss women in politics and women's decision-making autonomy. This will include women's participation and political representation in Middle Eastern politics. This part will include a discussion about women in relation to the legal systems of the Middle East and how it poses a "glass ceiling" for the career growth of women. Part two will be discussing how global politics produce a perpetuation of patriarchy. This will also include a brief discussion about the "inside/outside" approach. The third and last part will tackle how the social structure and the socially assigned gender roles have affected women's aspirations to challenge power relations.

II. WOMEN IN POLITICS: POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

All around the world women have been stuck in the private sphere, allowing their male counterparts to dominate the public and political sphere. Although the integration of women and their acceptance in the public sphere, as equally capable to occupy key positions and formulate intellectually critical opinions about the political arena, has been a gradual process that required decades of power struggle, it has been harder for the Muslim-dominated Middle East to come to terms with what they saw as a radical transformation of gender relations and ultimately power relations, due to their conservative, and colonial history. In the larger context of low women's political participation globally, the Middle East suffers from even lower penetration of women in politics. As a medium towards development and international integration, women present a somewhat "untapped resource in the social,

¹³ Dorothy, Smith, "A Biographical Sketch", in *7 Feminist and Gender Theories*, (New York: SAGE Publications, 1977): 318-324.

economic and political arenas in the region” (Akande, 2007).¹⁴ Akande’s point revolves around the inclusion of women in the social, economic, and political sphere as “producers” rather than as “consumers” or socially reproduced power relations. However Akande’s aspiration for the inclusion of women lacks to inform the readers about the judicial hinderers to this inclusion. Although the legal-structural reforms advocated by the liberal feminists, is of inferior importance because it does not encompass all contributing factors to women’s oppression, it is an important contributing factor, mainly because those laws are constituted in accordance with the capitalist demands.

The political-juridical structure determines over the women’s status in the society, their rights and access to resources. In the case of Egypt, laws criminalizing violence against women “are both vague and limited in their definition of the crimes they refer to,” (Harassmap, 2012).¹⁵ The failure of governments to set laws protecting and securing the rights and bodies of women contributes to their absence from the public sphere. A report issued by the UN Women in April 2013 reveals, “99.3% of girls and women are subjected to one form or another of harassment, which confirms the spread of this phenomenon in Egypt. 82.6% of the total female respondents announced that they neither felt secure nor safe in the street, while the rate of the sense of security and safety increases in places of education, in the home, within family circle and relatives and among friends” (Fahmy, 2015)¹⁶.

Although women have increasingly made efforts to change the power-relations by acquiring higher education in fields that were mainly reserved for the men, like law and medicine, in order to demand job opportunities in those fields, the legal system came served as hindrance. A perfect example for that is Article 10 in the “new” Egyptian constitution of 2013 that states “The state will work to strike a balance between the family duties of women and their work in society” (Amnesty International, 2013). Therefore in many countries, female judges, for example, are clustered in the family courts and lower civil courts, and a kind of “glass ceiling” prevents their promotion to the upper courts, this to “help” women balance their professional “obligations” with their household’s “obligations” – for example cleaning, cooking, and raising children. This further puts an emphasis on the socially

¹⁴ Abdul-Rahman B. Akande, “The Evolution Of Women In Middle Eastern Politics: Opportunities for Women In Parliament”, (The Fletcher School: Tufts University, 2007): 42-56.

¹⁵ Amnesty International: Harrasmap Report, 2012, “Egypt’s New Constitution Limits Fundamental Freedoms and ignores the Rights of Women”, 2012, www.amnesty.org, accessed 15th April 2015.

¹⁶ Nourhan Fahmy, “Violence against women still prevalent in Egypt: Amnesty International”, *Egypt: Daily News Egypt*, 2015, www.dailynewsegypt.com, accessed 15th April 2015.

constructed characteristics attributed to the females, forcing them to be in a state of “double-burden”, where they have to balance between their personal private life, and their professional public one. This can be further understood, in my opinion, in terms of global financial markets. Opening up the public sphere for women means that the income per family will increase. An increase in the family’s income makes them more susceptible to the purchasing of luxurious good, hence also making them more inclined to consume them, serving the interests of the property owning class; by assisting them in making more profit. Therefore it is safe to state that the case of Egypt can be generalized to the entire region of the Middle East, seeing that regardless of whether the state is a high-income monarchy, like Saudi Arabia, or a middle-income ‘Republic’ like Egypt, women are always in the margins when it comes to political life (Milton, 2000).¹⁷

Let us review Arab women’s participation in legislature (Sabbagh, 2005).¹⁸ The rate of female participation in the Middle East is the lowest in the world. The global average in January 2005 stood at 15.7 percent, yet in the Arab world it is only 6.7 percent. In contrast to most other regions of the world, in Arab countries women have generally been better represented in the upper houses of national parliaments than in the lower houses (IPU, 2005).¹⁹ This could be explained by the fact that ‘state feminism’ has been substantial to women and given them a larger share of upper house seats, since most upper houses in the Arab region are appointed. The question here being, who has the power to select and appoint? A personalization of the government has taken place and can, therefore, be misunderstood as an active process by states to the break down the social dichotomies.²⁰ Rather it was upheld for the legitimation of the state due to the fact that ones appointing the selected females are males. This puts an emphasis on the power relations between genders and between classes. An appointed female does not mean that the power relations have been modified; rather it indicates that class relations are influential and affective, and that women in “powerful” positions are being placed there after a selective process amongst the property owning classes in accordance to the power struggle between genders. Moreover tools like

¹⁷ Beverly Milton-Edwards, “Contemporary Politics of the Middle East”, (2000): 73-101.

¹⁸ Amal Sabbagh, “Case Study: The Arab States”, in *International IDEA, Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, (Sweden: International IDEA, 2005): 5-19.

¹⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), “Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 31 January 2005”, 2005, <http://www.ipu.org>, accessed 15th April 2015.

²⁰ Roger Owens, “The Search for sovereignty in an insecure World”, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012): 12-33.

religion and nationalism, led by values of patriarchy and superiority, are used to further perpetuate the class and gender relations in countries of the Middle East (Al-Ali, and Pratt, 2011).²¹

III. WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION AS A REFLECTION OF GLOBAL POLITICS

The “inside/outside” approach of the international political arena filtered down to the domestic in a way that altered the perception of how power relations, for example, are not only practiced on state-to-state basis, but also how the inter-state relationships are built and ultimately also how inter-personal relationships are governed.²² Therewith this paragraph will argue that there is no clear distinction between the international governing forces and the societal prevailing forcing, rather that both are mutually inclusive and influence one another.

This point can be further emphasized through the challenges that were posed by the international on the Middle East. After the Second World War the state of Israel was declared as a sovereign, internationally recognized state, which was problematic for the Arab countries surrounding the territory. The problems were further accelerated by the physical Israeli occupation of houses and of neighborhoods, which made the Palestinian population flee the country under the illusion that their Arab “brothers” would help them regain what is rightfully theirs. Ironically, their hopes were misled and their expectations were trashed. For countries like Lebanon and Jordan, the increase of refugees led to a call for the “protection of our local population” from the Palestinian Liberation Organizations (PLO), who allegedly tried to intermarry from the society and gradually assimilate into the private sphere in order to gain access to the public and political sphere.²³ This call was led by the patriarchal leaders and called for the fathers of the society to protect their daughters, wives from coming in contact with the Palestinian population. The challenges presented by the Arab–Israeli conflict, dating back more than half a century, still form the main backdrop to many of the political, economic and social issues in the Arab world. While these conflicts

²¹ Al-Ali, and Pratt, “Between Nationalism and Women’s Rights: The Kurdish Women’s Movement in Iraq”, (United Kingdom: Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication 4, 2011): p. 337–353.

²² R.B. J. Walker, "Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory." *Cambridge Books Online*. (UK: Cambridge University Press, July 2011), accessed 15th April 2015.

²³ Milton, op. cit., p.102-133.

have affected each Arab country differently, in many ways regional conflicts have seemingly shaped the policies of each Arab nation and had an impact on citizens' daily lives. These policies were constructed to perpetuate the power relations between the male and female population in order to "protect". These social dichotomies were constructed and propagated not only for the legitimation of the ruling elite and their preposterous policies, but also for to serve the atmosphere of an existing external threat from which the population needs protection. Therewith class differences were ignored or seen as inferior to the national interest.²⁴

After the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, former members of the Empire started calling for independence. An increasing interest in the newly "independent" states was trending. However the Middle East only became important to the west after formal colonialism ended. North America and Western Europe were threatened by the ruling powers in the Middle East, and that it may hinder their relatively free access to the natural endowments of the region. Therefore, the oil-producing states, striving for economic prosperity and political success, were attracted to the idea of receiving gargantuan amounts of rent for a natural endowment, that requires little to almost no effort to support their economies. Therewith the Arab countries have been transformed into rentier states.²⁵ Yet international indicators illustrate that most of their economies are not embedded in industrial modes of production, varying as they do between oil-rich countries, human-resource-rich countries and very poor countries. Nevertheless, economic trends in the region have passed through a set of phases, which have influenced the policies of governments and popular attitudes towards women's economic participation. As research shows, past state policies promoted women's economic participation, especially during the 1970s, when most of the male labor force was working in oil-rich countries and state bureaucracies were in dire need of educated females. However, things changed dramatically during the economic crisis of the 1980s, when sometimes explicit government measures were introduced to marginalize the female labor force in favor of the male one (World Bank, 2003).²⁶

²⁴ Ann Tickner, "Gender in International Relations Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security", (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992): p.1-21.

²⁵ Robert Springborg, "GCC Countries as "Rentier States" Revisited", *The Middle East Journal* vol. 67 no.2, (2013): p.301-309.

²⁶ World Bank, "Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere", (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003). ¹¹³_{SEP}

IV. PERPETUATION OF PATRIARCHY IN THE FAMILY DYNAMICS

The family is very significant in Arab life, serving as the main unit of society and offering security to its members. The importance of the family in providing men and women, as well as children, with social security and protection is fully recognized. More recently, though, the viability of the current patriarchal family model has been questioned. This is because various demographic and social trends are placing growing numbers of women outside the safe space that is supposed to be created by the family.²⁷ The World Bank explains that gender roles and dynamics within Arab households are shaped by a traditional gender paradigm that presumes that the most important contribution women make to the family and society is as homemakers and mothers. This could explain women's low participation rates in both the labor force and the political sphere; Women are caregivers and men are breadwinners.²⁸

Unsurprisingly, the double burden of balancing family and career puts too much pressure on many women. However some believe that this is the major reason why women choose not to try and participate in the public sphere.²⁹ Yet research has also shown that women who have advanced their careers did not do so at the expense of their families. Rather, they had their own innovative strategies that helped them to balance both responsibilities and enjoy them.³⁰ However those are the anomalies of the rule. Most married women in the Middle East are pressured by society and by their families to become housewives as it serves the "purpose of their existence". An analysis of women's roles in the 1950, carried out by Robbix Coob in 2005 resembles my analysis of women's roles in the 21st century in the Middle East. He stated that in the 1950 Society placed high importance and many expectations on behavior at home as well as in public. Women were supposed to fulfill certain roles, such as a caring mother, a diligent homemaker, and an obedient wife. The perfect mother was supposed to stay home and nurture so society would accept them. A diligent housewife had dinner on the table precisely at the moment her husband arrived from

²⁷ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), "Progress of Arab Women 2004", (Amman: UNIFEM Arab States Regional Office, 2004): p. 123.

²⁸ World Bank, op. cit., pp. 8–9.

²⁹ Helou, op. cit., p. 256.

³⁰ Amal Sabbagh, "Women's Work and Achievement in the Jordanian Civil Service", in *The Arab Quota Report*, (United Kingdom: University of Nottingham, 1997): 8-19.

work. A wife was a "good" wife only if she carried out her man's every order and agreed with him on everything. In fact, even if she wanted to voice an opinion, his education, or rather lack of thereof would not allow it" (Coob, 2005).³¹

This puts an emphasis on the fact that patriarchy did exist at some point yet still appears to exist after almost 75 years in Arab family settings. In many instances for example, women do not have the independence to vote for their preferred candidate, backing instead the person that the family supports. The patriarchal setting also results in the 'political legacy' of a family being left to the son rather than to the daughter. Additionally, some Arab countries require that a wife follow her husband with regard to residence and sectarian affiliation. A woman who decides to stand for election has to do so in her husband's electoral district or compete for a seat allocated to his sect. Unless she already belongs to the same sect or district, therefore, she has to start from scratch, socially and politically.³²

With such patriarchal forces restricting women's participation, one may wonder whether female members of female-headed households stand a better chance than women in male-headed households. Research suggests not: members of female-headed households are less likely to participate in the political domain.³³ While no explanations are offered of this surprising phenomenon, it might be that poverty, often associated with female-headed households, prevents family members from participating. Although there is little evidence of the correlation between poverty and political participation of women, it is safe and logical to assume that a poor human is less inclined to politically participate and rather seeks to survive. Research that was conducted about employment in the Middle East suggests that the region suffers from a graduate-unemployment crisis which makes the families more tending to allow the male youth to look for job vacancies than women, and to burden the women to reproduce male offspring in order to enhance the family's economic status and increase the family's income.³⁴ Regardless of the fact that some women may be more qualified to hold jobs, the priority goes to the men. Springborg makes the argument that one

³¹ Robbix Coob, "A Woman's Role in the 1950s", *University of Colorado*, AM Studies, November 17, 2005, <http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/1025/women1950s.pdf>, accessed April 18, 2015.

³² Helou, op. cit., pp. 257–8.^[11]_[SEP]

³³ Uga Tiltne, "Women and Political Participation in Jordan", in Hussein Abu Rumman (ed.), *Arab Women and Political Participation*, (Amman: al-Urdon al-Jadid Research Centre, 2000).^[11]_[SEP]

³⁴ Sean F. McMahon, "Internationalizing The Egyptian State after the 25th January 2011: A Neo-Gramscian Analysis", (Workingpaper, 2013): p.1-24.

of the demographic deficits in the Middle East is that the population is too poor “A study released in September 2011 by the Egyptian government’s Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics revealed that the percentage of Egyptians living at or below the World Bank’s poverty line of \$2 per day increased from 19.6% to 21.8% in the five years ending in 2009. Almost half the rural population of Upper Egypt lives in poverty” (Springborg, 2011).³⁵

The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2005 report, on the other hand claims that women in the Arab world are “on the rise”, due to the concurrent it is fair to say that this report is imperfect in many ways, seeing that it is guided by liberal frameworks and language, which marginalizes the vibrant contemporary alternative language of political economy and imperialism by giving it little space social movements or collective resistance and struggles over power.³⁶ Abu-Lughod makes the argument that despite the *Arab Human Development Report 2005*, which assumes that the needs of the Arab women have been identified and are improving due to their efforts, western imperialism and classism exists in the Middle East.³⁷ She states that the report believes the cost of transportation and education are the causes for the absence of women’s labor in the Middle East. However she refutes this delusional belief by stating that the report was based on the statistics gathered from property owning women, and generalized to be representative of the female population, which it isn’t. She states that low wages, harassment, lack of child support services, are reasons enough for rural women to want to be housewives. Moreover she states that with the erosion of wages in the public sector associated with neoliberal reform, makes women realize that they have more autonomy at home than in the work place. To the wives of working class men it thus makes economic sense to stay at home and “save money” rather than try to “earn it”. The women who stay at home engage in petty trading and production like sewing, or raising chickens, which is more profitable than working in the public sector. When it comes to imperialism she states that the values and needs of the property owning classes are imposed on the local women, and that the values and needs of the western, white women is imposed on the property owning women of the south; Employment for the western, white women is liberating while for the southern women it could be an economic

³⁵ Robert Springborg, “The Precarious Economics of the Arab Spring, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, issue no. 53:6, 2011, p.85-104.

³⁶ Asef Bayat, "Transforming the Arab World: The Arab Human Development Report and the Politics of Change." *Development and Change* 36.6 (2005): 1225-237.

³⁷ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Dialectics of Women’s Empowerment: The International Circuitry of the *Arab Human Development Report 2005*”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, issue no. 41, 2009, p.83-103.

burden, because it does not automatically mean economic independence, and ultimately power to challenge the power relations dominated by the males of the society.

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper it has been showcased that women are silenced by force and not by choice. The unequal power relations between genders, and the socially constructed attitude prescribes to women in form of rules, norms, and values of how females should behave, have all contributed to the absence of women from the public and political sphere. Furthermore, patriarchy has been proven to be more than a concept that might apply or not, it is an ideology that governs the relations between female and male. Moreover, this paper has also contributed in the understanding that there is no distinction between the international structure and the domestic structure of power relations. Like the international political arena, men dominate the public and political sphere in states of the Middle East, and the appearance of a women in the international sphere, is just an illusion and a cover-up for the unequal distribution of power.

This paper has put an emphasis on Marxist feminist theory being the most suitable for the analysis of gender relations, seeing that it does not see any force being independent from influencing gender relations, rather that economic, political, and external factors all contribute to the subordination, exclusion, and taciturnity of women.

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