



Gender, Urban Development, and the Politics of Space in the Middle East

Nazanin Shahrokni

Over the past decade, a great body of work has drawn our attention to urban development and the politics of space production in the Middle East, and the various ways in which these are shaped by neoliberalism, Islamism, domestic authoritarianism, and geopolitical configurations. In this lecture we will draw on this rich literature to shed a critical light, not just on what urban development and urbanization enable (i.e., economic growth, employment, and vibrant cultural life), but also on exclusionary trends and socio-economic inequalities that they engender.

When it comes to gender and the city, however, much of this critical literature, adopts a rather ahistorical approach and places emphasis on religion as a primary driver of gendered urban policies and practices. Such perspectives fail to consider the differences and disparities of gendered urban policies and practices across the Middle East, a shorthand term we use to refer to a cluster of diverse, unevenly developed, and internally differentiated societies. Thus, in this lecture, drawing on new cases studies from various national settings within the MENA region, we will address the inertia of prioritizing and reifying religion in the discussion of gendered urban spaces, and give due attention to how these spaces are socially and historically situated and the dynamics underpinning them.



Conceptualizing Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies in the Middle East and North Africa. Historical and Theoretical Perspectives

Lucia Sorbera

Since the late 1970s, the feminist turn produced an epochal epistemic shift in the humanities and the social sciences. By rescuing women from the marginalization of knowledge's production, feminist scholars did not simply aim at writing an "added" or "parallel" scholarship; they aspired to question dominant narratives that had traditionally silenced and wiped-out women. By introducing relationality as a core category of analysis, feminist scholars questioned the male-centred studies about literature, politics, society, and history, and they produced compelling investigations that shed-light on the nexus between gender, sexuality, and power, and on the interdependence between the public and the private spheres.

In the Middle East, North Africa and, more broadly, in Muslim majority societies of the twentieth century, feminist scholarship soon intersected the study of anti-colonial struggles and the processes of post-colonial state building. In these contexts, the analysis of orientalist representations of women, gender, and sexuality became crucial to the postcolonial feminist critique, as feminist scholars focused on demonstrating how such depictions reflected both colonial power relationships and the gendered nature of colonialism. Since these early steps, the fields of women, gender, and sexuality studies rapidly evolved, also by intersecting subaltern, critical race studies and, more recently, decolonial epistemologies, so that it is not exaggeration to affirm that this is today one of the most dynamic fields in Islamic and more broadly SWANA studies. In this seminar we will discuss the relatively rapid evolution of these approaches, from the late 1970s until today, by providing an overview of both the pathbreaking and the newest studies, their themes, theoretical approaches, sources, and methods of investigation. Particular attention will be given to the intersection between women, feminist, and sexualities studies with other approaches, from the more consolidated, such as the subaltern and critical race theories, to the most innovative decolonial and Indigenous epistemologies, which have been informing Latin American and Sub-Saharan African scholarship for at least two decades but are moving into the SWANA contexts.



TOMidEast
SUMMER SCHOOL

TUESDAY
July 5
09.30-12.30

Resisting Sectarianism: Queer Activism in Postwar Lebanon

Tamirace Fakhoury

This lecture explores the nexus between gender & LGBTQ struggles and Lebanon's politics of sectarianism. It zooms in on the 2019 revolutionary uprising and looks at how LGBTQ and feminist movements have mobilized with a view to dismantling the sectarian system. In this regard, the lecture explores the dilemmas and constraints that thwart these bottom-up mobilization attempts. Final reflections will problematize the resilience of Lebanon's sectarian-led model of politics, and the various challenges it inflicts on subaltern and everyday politics.



TOMidEast
SUMMER SCHOOL

TUESDAY
July 5
15.00-17.00

A postcolonial perspective on gender in the Middle East

Saba A. Le Renard

Postcolonial feminist perspectives in the Middle East have deconstructed and historicized simplistic binary oppositions such as modern/traditional and insisted on the need to take into account imperialism, capitalism and class when studying gender in the region. During this talk, I propose to pursue this path by questioning what studies of the Arabian Peninsula reveal about intersectionality, migration, imperial hegemony and racial hierarchies in the Middle East. The talk will be based mainly on empirical case studies of Western passport holders' social positions, lifestyles and subjectivities in Saudi Arabia and Dubai.



TOMidEast
SUMMER SCHOOL

WEDNESDAY
July 6
09.30-12.30

On the Move: Gender and Race in the era of hyper-globalization

Sabiha Allouche

Our lecture prioritizes intersectionality in order to historicize the trajectory of women and LGBT activism in the region. We find that this trajectory, far from being straightforward, is rife with contestations that help nuance our understanding of state-society relations, the place of religion and culture, the enmeshment of governance with historical racialization processes, and the relevance of our hyper-connected and globally-mediated relations to issues related to gender and sexuality. To this end, we explore a range of cases, including the controversies surrounding the 2022 Qatar World Cup and the kafala system, the failed promises of the "West" as a haven of liberty for women and LGBT bodies escaping sexual discrimination and oppression, and the promises (and limitations) of transnational activism and solidarity work.



Gender Paradoxes in the MENA Region: Understanding Women's "Invisible Presence" in Political Life

Yasmine **Berriane**

Building on a review of the literature combined with concrete examples from my research in Morocco, this talk will focus on one of the main paradoxes that characterize women's political participation in North Africa and the Middle East: the combination of both their absence and their presence as political actors. It will show that women's underrepresentation in formal politics does not mean that they do not participate, but rather that they participate in alternative spaces. For a full picture it is therefore important to broaden our understating of political participation and to consider the interactive dynamics that are observable between formal and informal politics.



Gender politics and contemporary counterpublics: Conceptualizing feminist activism beyond the co-optation vs. resistance dichotomy

Selin Çağatay

This lecture offers perspectives on gender politics in contemporary feminist counterpublics as differentiated from hegemonic feminisms that operate within a state-civil society-global governance nexus. Based on recent research (2017-2020) on the agendas, organizational forms, and political strategies of contemporary feminist activism in Turkey, I discuss that counterpublic feminisms tend to take more autonomous, informal, horizontal, or small-scale structures, and have an intersectional approach to gender politics. At the same time, the demarcation line between hegemonic and counterpublic feminisms is contingent as a.) the feminist counterpublic temporally expands and shrinks based on the specific agenda at hand, and b.) counterpublic feminisms often seek alternative ways of institutionalization which might lead to coopted relationships with institutions, local state structures, and social movements. Conceptualizing feminist activism beyond the co-optation vs. resistance dichotomy may help researchers to understand feminism as a fragmented, multi-layered movement and to better grasp the complex relationship between feminist politics and the historically specific contexts in which it operates.



TOMidEast
SUMMER SCHOOL

THURSDAY
July 7
15.00-17.00

Gendering Transitional Justice in Tunisia: A Global Politics of Subalternity

Sélima **Kebaili**

Transitional justice, a set of instruments intended to bring peace to and democratize societies through the recognition of victims, was the subject of considerable mobilization in postrevolutionary Tunisia. The specific inclusion of female victims in the process was addressed by institutional measures, which led to the implementation of a gender program by international organizations, such as the United Nations or the International Center for Transitional Justice. This session looks at how gender norms and representations are transferred through international gender mainstreaming measures in so -called “post-conflict” contexts. Based on ethnographic observation of the construction of a memorial dedicated to women’s experience of the dictatorship in Tunisia, we’ll discuss how international organizations, by relying on the racialization of violence against women, emptied the political content of Tunisian women experiences of repression.



Research on gender in research: methodological and ethical issues

Francesco **Cavatorta**

There are two separate but interrelated ways in which gender is relevant in the study of the Middle East. First and foremost, gender is among the most widespread topics being studied because of the contentious nature of women's rights and the role of women in society and politics with several Orientalist assumptions at the core of the debate. Second, the increasing number of women doing research in the Middle East on a variety of topics has led to discussions about what their positionality means.

This presentation will discuss both aspects of research on gender and gender in research and it argues that there is a lot more complexity to this than it appears at first. Such complexity includes notions of insider/outsider for instance or the ethics of 'exploiting' gender for access.