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# MODERNIZING WOMEN

## Gender and Social Change in the Middle East

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# Contents

# 1

# Recasting the Middle East, North Africa, and Afghanistan

*Men are the managers of the affairs of women*
*for that God has preferred in bounty*
*one of them over another. . . .*
*And those you fear may be rebellious*
*admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them.*
—Quran, Sura 4, verse 38

*[I]nsofar as all texts are polysemic, they are open to variant readings. We cannot therefore look to a text alone to explain why people have read it in a particular mode or why they tend to favor one reading of it over another. This is especially true of a sacred text like the Qur'an which "has been ripped from its historical, linguistic, literary, and psychological contexts and then been continually recontextualized in various cultures and according to the ideological needs of various actors" (Arkoun 1994, 5). . . . In particular, we need to examine the roles of Muslim interpretive communities and states (the realm of sexual politics) in shaping religious knowledge and authority in ways that enabled patriarchal readings of the Qur'an.*
—Asma Barlas

The study of social change has tended to regard certain societal institutions and structures as central and then to examine how these change. Family structure, the organization of markets, the state, religious hierarchies, schools, the ways elites have exploited masses to extract surpluses from them, and the general set of values that governs society's cultural outlook are part of the long list of key institutions. In societies everywhere, cultural institutions and practices, economic processes, and political structures are interactive and relatively autonomous. In the Marxist framework, infrastructures and superstructures are made up of multiple levels, and there are various types of transformations from one level to another. There is also an interactive relationship between structure and agency, inasmuch as structural changes are linked to "consciousness"—whether this be class consciousness (of interest to Marxists) or gender consciousness (of interest to feminists).

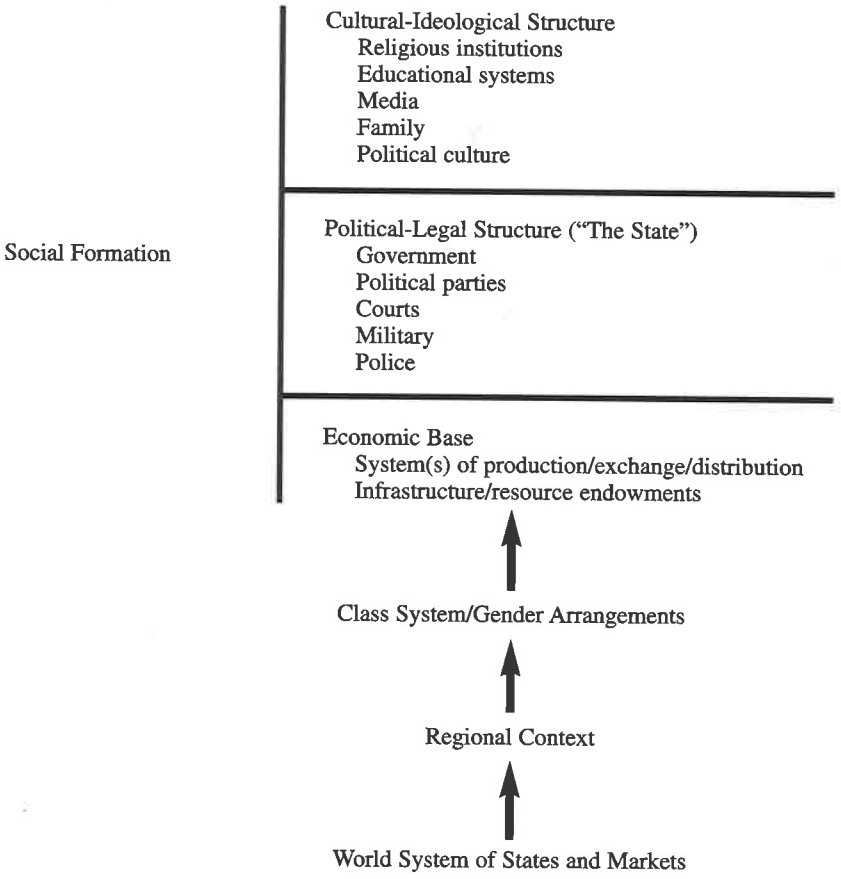
Social change and societal development come about principally through technological advancements, class conflict, and political action. Each social formation is located within and subject to the influences of a national class structure, a regional context, and a global system of states and markets. The world-system perspective regards states and national economies as situated within an international capitalist nexus with a division of labor corresponding to its constituent parts—core, periphery, and semiperiphery. As such, no major social change occurs outside of the world context.[1] Thus, to understand the roles and status of women or changes in the structure of the family, for example, it is necessary to examine economic development and political change—which in turn are affected by regional and global developments. As we shall see in the discussion of women's employment, the structural determinants of class location, state legal policy, development strategy, and world-market fluctuations come together to shape the pace and rhythm of women's integration in the labor force and their access to economic resources. Figure 1.1 illustrates the institutions and structures that affect and are affected by social changes in a Marxist-informed world-system perspective. The institutions are embedded within a class structure (the system of production, accumulation, and surplus distribution), a set of gender arrangements and norms (ascribed roles to men and women through custom or law; cultural understandings of feminine and masculine), a regional context (e.g., the Middle East, Europe, Latin America), and a world system of states and markets characterized by asymmetries between core, periphery, and semiperiphery countries.

The study of social change is also often done comparatively. Although it cannot be said that social scientists have a single, universally recognized "comparative method," some of our deepest insights into society and culture are reached in and through comparison. In this book, comparisons among women within the region will be made, and some comparisons will be made between Middle East/North African women and women of other third world regions. Indeed, as a major objective of this book is to show the changing and variable status of women in the Middle East, the most effective method is to study the subject comparatively, emphasizing the factors that best explain the differences in women's status across the region and over time.

Yet such an approach is rarely applied to the Middle East, and even less so to women in Muslim societies in general.[2] Indeed, in the wake of the terrorist assaults on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, a new wave of commentary appeared, especially in the United States, that questioned the capacity of Muslim and especially Middle Eastern countries to establish modern, democratic, secular, and gender-egalitarian social systems. One article claimed that Muslim societies have fallen behind Western societies because of the "slow evolution of Islamic societies' treatment of women."[3] Even a disinterested academic study on religion, secularization, and



**Figure 1.1 Social Structures and Principal Institutions in Contemporary Societies; Their Embeddedness Within Class, Gender, and Regional and Global Relations**




gender equality asserted that countries in the Islamic world are most resistant to the achievement of equality between women and men.[4]

## Debating the Status of Muslim Women

That women's legal status and social positions are worse in Muslim countries than anywhere else is a common view. The prescribed role of women in Islamic theology and law is often argued to be a major determinant of

women's status. Women are perceived as wives and mothers, and gender segregation is customary, and sometimes legally required. Whereas economic provision is the responsibility of men, women must marry and reproduce to earn status. Men, unlike women, have the unilateral right of divorce; a woman can work and travel only with the written permission of her male guardian; family honor and good reputation, or the negative consequence of shame, rest most heavily upon the conduct of women. Through the Shari'a, Islam dictates the legal and institutional safeguards of honor, thereby justifying and reinforcing the segregation of society according to sex. Muslim societies are characterized by higher-than-average fertility, higher-than-average mortality, and rapid rates of population growth. It is well known that age at marriage affects fertility. As recently as the late 1980s, an average of 34 percent of all brides in Muslim countries were under twenty years of age, and women in Muslim nations bore an average of six children.

The Muslim countries of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia also have a distinct gender disparity in literacy and education, as well as low rates of female labor force participation and labor force shares. In 1980 women's share of the labor force was lowest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA, 23 percent) and highest in the communist economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (including Central Asia). In 1997 women's share of the labor force in MENA had increased to about 27 percent, but it was still the lowest of any region in the world economy, including South Asia, where the female share was 33 percent.[5]

High fertility, low literacy, and low labor force participation are commonly linked to the low status of women, which in turn is often attributed to the prevalence of Islamic law and norms in Middle Eastern societies. It is said that because of the continuing importance of values such as family honor and modesty, women's participation in nonagricultural or paid labor carries with it a social stigma, and gainful employment is not perceived as part of their role.[6]

Muslim societies, like many others, harbor illusions about immutable gender differences. There is a very strong contention that women are different beings—*different* often meaning *inferior* in legal status and rights—which strengthens social barriers to women's achievement. In the realm of education and employment, not only is it believed that women do not have the same interests as men and will therefore avoid men's activities, but also care is exercised to make sure they cannot prepare for roles considered inappropriate. Women's reproductive function or religious norms have been used to justify their segregation in public, their restriction to the home, and their lack of civil and legal rights. As both a reflection of this state of affairs and a contributing factor, those governments of Muslim countries that have signed or ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have done so with religiously based reservations that counteract both the spirit and the letter of the convention.[7]



Is the Middle East, then, so different from other regions? Can we understand women's roles and status only in terms of the ubiquity of deference to Islam in the region? In fact, such conceptions are too facile. It is my contention that the position of women in the Middle East cannot be attributed to the presumed intrinsic properties of Islam. It is also my position that Islam is neither more nor less patriarchal than other major religions, especially Hinduism and the other two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, all of which share the view of woman as wife and mother. Within Christianity, religious women continue to struggle for a position equal with men, as the ongoing debate over women priests in Catholicism attests. As late as 1998, the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States passed a resolution calling on wives to follow and obey their husbands. In Hinduism a potent female symbol is that of the *sati,* the self-immolating widow. And the Orthodox Jewish law of personal status bears many similarities to the fundamentals of Islamic law, especially with respect to marriage and divorce.[8] The gender configurations that draw heavily from religion and cultural norms to govern women's work, political praxis, family status, and other aspects of their lives in the Middle East are not unique to Muslim or Middle Eastern countries.

Religious-based law exists in the Middle East, but not exclusively in Muslim countries; it is also present in the Jewish state of Israel. Rabbinical judges are reluctant to grant women divorces, and, as in Saudi Arabia, Israeli women cannot hold public prayer services. The sexual division of labor in the home and in the society is largely shaped by the Halacha, or Jewish law, and by traditions that continue to discriminate against women. Marital relations in Israel, governed by Jewish law, determine that the husband should pay for his wife's maintenance, while she should provide household services. According to one account, "The structure of the arrangement is such that the woman is sheltered from the outside world by her husband and in return she adequately runs the home. The obligations one has toward the other are not equal but rather based on clear gender differentiation."[9]

Neither are the marriage and fertility patterns mentioned above unique to Muslim countries; high fertility rates are found in sub-Saharan African countries today and were common in Western countries in the early stage of industrialization and the demographic transition. The low status accorded women is found in non-Muslim areas as well. In the most patriarchal regions of West and South Asia, especially India, there are marked gender disparities in the delivery of healthcare and access to food, resulting in an excessive mortality rate for women.[10] In northern India and parts of rural China, the preference for boys leads to neglect of baby girls to such extent that infant and child mortality is greater among females; moreover, female feticide has been well documented. As recently as 2002, the female/male sex ratio in China and India was 94:100. The low status of women and girls, therefore, should be understood

not in terms of the intrinsic properties of any one religion but of kin-ordered patriarchal and agrarian structures.

Finally, it should be recalled that in all Western societies women as a group were disadvantaged until relatively recently.[11] Indeed, Islam provided women with property rights for centuries while women in Europe were denied the same rights. In India, Muslim property codes were more progressive than English law until the mid–nineteenth century. It should be stressed, too, that even in the West today there are marked variations in the legal status, economic conditions, and social positions of women. The United States, for example, lags behind northern Europe in terms of social policies and overall security for women. Why Muslim women lag behind Western women in legal rights, mobility, autonomy, and so forth, has more to do with developmental issues—the extent of urbanization, industrialization, and proletarianization, as well as the political ploys of state managers—than with religious and cultural factors.

Gender asymmetry and the status of women in the Muslim world cannot be solely attributed to Islam, because adherence to Islamic precepts and the applications of Islamic legal codes differ throughout the Muslim world. For example, Tunisia and Turkey are secular states, and only Iran has direct clerical rule. Consequently, women's legal and social positions are quite varied, as this book will detail. And within the same Muslim society, social class largely determines the degrees of sex segregation, female autonomy, and mobility. Today upper-class women have more mobility than lower-class women, although in the past it was the reverse: veiling and seclusion were upper-class phenomena. By examining changes over time and variations within societies and by comparing Muslim and non-Muslim gender patterns, one recognizes that the status of women in Muslim societies is neither uniform nor unchanging nor unique.

## Assessing Women's Status

Since the 1980s, the subject of women in the Middle East has been tied to the larger issue of Islamic revival, also known as fundamentalism or Islamism, in the region. The rise of Islamist movements in the Middle East has reinforced stereotypes about the region, in particular the idea that Islam is ubiquitous in the culture and politics of the region, that tradition is tenacious, that the clergy have the highest authority, and that women's status is everywhere low. How do we begin to assess the status of women in Islam or in the Middle East? Critics and advocates of Islam hold sharply divergent views on the matter. One author sardonically classified much of the literature on the status of women as representing either "misery research" or "dignity research." The



former focuses on the utterly oppressive aspects of Muslim women's lives, while the latter seeks to show the strength of women's positions in their families and communities. In either case, it is the status of women *in Islam* that is being scrutinized. In some of their writings, secular feminists Juliette Minces, Mai Ghoussoub, Haideh Moghissi, and Haleh Afshar describe adherence to Islamic norms and laws as the main impediment to women's advancement. Leila Ahmed once concluded that Islam is incompatible with feminism—even with the more mainstream/modernist notion of women's rights—because Islam regards women as the weak and inferior sex.[12] Fatima Mernissi, although critical of the existing inequalities, has stressed that the idea of an inferior sex is alien to Islam; it was because of their "strengths" that women had to be subdued and kept under control.[13] Freda Hussein raised counterarguments based on the concept of "complementarity of the sexes" in Islam. Azizah al-Hibri, Riffat Hassan, Asma Barlas, and other Western-based Islamic or Muslim feminists seek to show the genuinely egalitarian and emancipatory content of the Quran, which they maintain has been hijacked by patriarchal interpretations since the early Middle Ages.[14] Finally, those who identify most closely with Islamic law are convinced that Islam provides all the rights necessary for humankind and womankind, and that Islamic states go the furthest in establishing these rights (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of Islamist women activists).

As noted by the Turkish sociologist Yakin Ertürk, these arguments draw attention to interesting and controversial aspects of the problem, but many of them neither provide us with consistent theoretical tools with which to grasp the problem of women's status nor guide us in formulating effective policy for strategy and action. They are either ethnocentric in their critique of Islam or relativistic in stressing cultural specificity. The former approach attributes a conservative role to Islam, assuming that it is an obstacle to progress—whether it be material progress or progress with respect to the status of women. Ertürk argues that overemphasizing the role of Islam not only prevents us from looking at the more fundamental social contradictions that often foster religious requirements but also implies little hope for change, because Islam is regarded by its followers as the literal word of God and therefore absolute. For the Muslim thinkers, a relativist stand is essentially a defensive response and imprisons its advocates in a pseudonationalistic and religious pride. The cultural relativist approach produces a circular argument by uncritically relying on the concept of cultural variability/specificity in justifying Islamic principles.[15] Many Western observers who resort to relativism in their approach to Islam hold liberal worldviews and treat Islamic practices within the context of individual freedom to worship; any interference with that freedom is seen as a violation of human rights. During the 1980s and 1990s, this view underpinned policies of "multiculturalism," "diversity," and "tolerance"

in Western Europe and North America, which many feminists came to criticize, arguing that gender differences and inequalities are occluded by this preoccupation with the human rights of cultural groups.[16]

The focus on the status of women *in Islam* may be important to theologians and to believing women, but it does little to satisfy social science or feminist inquiry. For one thing, Islam is experienced, practiced, and interpreted quite differently over time and space. Tunisian sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba convincingly shows that although the Islamic community may consider itself unified, Islam is fundamentally "plastic," inasmuch as there are various Islams—Tunisian, Iranian, Malay, Afghan, Saudia Arabian, Nigerian, and so on.[17] In order to understand the social implications of Islam, therefore, it is necessary to look at the broader sociopolitical and economic order within which it is exercised. Whether the content of the Quran is inherently conservative and hostile toward women or egalitarian and emancipatory is not irrelevant to social science or feminist inquiry, but it is less central or problematical than it is often made out to be.

Clearly, an alternative is needed to the conceptual trap and political problem created by the devil of ethnocentrism and the deep blue sea of cultural relativism. In this regard it is useful to refer to various "universal declarations" and conventions formulated within the United Nations and agreed upon by the world community. For example, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (of 1948) provides for both equality between women and men and freedom of religion. The practical meaning of gender equality and means to achieve it have been reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted on December 10, 1979. The convention entered into force in 1981 and by April 2000 all but twenty-six countries had ratified or acceded to it. Similarly, with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, governments reached a consensus to "seek to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout the life cycle." The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, CEDAW, and the Platform for Action are all intended to set out universally agreed-upon norms. They were framed by people from diverse cultures, religions, and nationalities and intended to take into account such factors as religion and cultural traditions of countries. For that reason, CEDAW makes no provision whatsoever for differential interpretation based on culture or religion. Instead, it states clearly in Article 2 that "States Parties . . . undertake . . . to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women."[18] All three conventions are thus culturally neutral and universal in their applicability. They provide a solid and legitimate political point of departure for women's rights activists everywhere. In turn, women's rights activists throughout the Middle East seek implementation of CEDAW and the formulation of national action plans for women's advancement based on the Beijing Platform for Action, and are strong proponents of human rights, which they understand to encompass civil, political, and social rights. Many feminists, including Marxist-feminists, would agree with Abdullahi An-Na'im that "human rights are claims we make for the protection of our vital interests in bodily integrity, material well-being, and human dignity."[19]



As for social-scientific research to assess and compare the positions of women in different societies, a sixfold framework of dimensions of women's status adopted from Janet Giele—a framework that is quite consistent with the spirit of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action—can usefully guide concrete investigations of women's positions within and across societies:

*Political expression.* What rights do women possess, formally and otherwise? Can they own property in their own right? Can they express any dissatisfactions within their own political and social movements?

*Work and mobility.* How do women fare in the formal labor force? How mobile are they, how well are they paid, how are their jobs ranked, and what leisure do they get?

*Family* (formation, duration, and size). What is the age of marriage? Do women choose their own partners? Can they divorce them? What is the status of single women and widows? Do women have freedom of movement?

*Education.* What access do women have, how much can they attain, and is the curriculum the same for them as for men?

*Health and sexual control.* What is women's mortality, to what particular illnesses and stresses (physical and mental) are they exposed, and what control do they have over their own fertility?

*Cultural expression.* What images of women and their "place" are prevalent, and how far do these reflect or determine reality? What can women do in the cultural field?[20]

This is a useful way of specifying and delineating changes and trends in women's social roles in the economy, the polity, and the cultural sphere. It enables the researcher (and activist) to move from generalities to specificities and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of women's positions. It focuses on women's betterment rather than on culture or religion, and it has wide applicability. At the same time, it draws attention to women as actors. Women are not only the passive targets of policies or the victims of distorted development; they are also shapers and makers of social change—especially Middle Eastern women in the new millennium.

## Diversity in the Middle East

To study the Middle East and North Africa is to recognize the diversity within the region and within the female population. Contrary to popular opinion, the Middle East is not a uniform and homogeneous region. Women are themselves stratified by class, ethnicity, education, and age. There is no archetypal Middle Eastern Woman, but rather women inserted in quite diverse socioeconomic and cultural arrangements. The fertility behavior and needs of a poor peasant woman are quite different from those of a professional woman or a wealthy urbanite. The educated Saudi woman who has no need for employment and is chauffeured by a Sri Lankan migrant worker has little in common with the educated Moroccan woman who needs to work to augment the family income and also acquires status with a professional position. There is some overlap in cultural conceptions of gender in Morocco and Saudi Arabia, but there are also profound dissimilarities (and driving is only one of the more trivial ones). Saudi Arabia is far more conservative than Morocco in terms of what is considered appropriate for women.

Women are likewise divided ideologically and politically. Some women activists align themselves with liberal, social democratic, or communist organizations; others support Islamist/fundamentalist groups. Some women reject religion as patriarchal; others wish to reclaim religion for themselves or to identify feminine aspects of it. Some women reject traditions and time-honored customs; others find identity, solace, and strength in them. More research is needed to determine whether social background shapes and can predict political and ideological affiliation, but in general women's social positions have implications for their consciousness and activism.

The countries of the Middle East and North Africa differ in their historical evolution, social composition, economic structures, and state forms. All the countries are Arab except Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, and Turkey. All the countries are predominantly Muslim except Israel. All Muslim countries are predominantly Sunni except Iran, which is predominantly Shi'a, and Iraq, with equal parts Sunni and Shi'a. Some of the countries have Christian populations that were once sizable (Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, the Palestinians, Syria); others are ethnically diverse (Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq); some have had strong working-class movements and trade unions (Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey) or large communist organizations (Iran, Egypt, the Palestinians, Sudan). A few still have nomadic and semi-sedentary populations (Afghanistan, Libya, Saudi Arabia). In almost all countries, a considerable part of the middle classes have received Western-style education.

Economically, the countries of the region comprise oil economies poor in other resources, including population (Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates [UAE]); mixed oil economies (Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria); and non-oil economies (Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Turkey, Yemen). The countries are further divided into the city-states (such as Qatar and the UAE); the "desert states" (for example, Libya and Saudi Arabia); and the "normal states" (Iran, Egypt, Syria, Turkey). The latter have a more diversified structure, and their resources include oil, agricultural land, and large populations. Some MENA countries are rich in capital and import labor (Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia), while others are poor in capital or are middle-income countries that export labor (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen). Some countries have more-developed class structures than others; the size and significance of the industrial working class, for example, varies across the region. There is variance in the development of skills ("human capital formation"), in the depth and scope of industrialization, in the development of infrastructure, in standards of living and welfare, and in the size of the female labor force.



Politically, the state types range from theocratic monarchism (Saudi Arabia) to secular republicanism (Turkey). Several Gulf states have no constitutions; until 1992 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had no formal constitution apart from the Quran and the Shari'a, the Islamic legal code. Many of the states in the Middle East have experienced legitimacy problems, which became acute in the 1980s. Political scientists have used various terms to describe the states in the Middle East: "authoritarian-socialist" (for Algeria, Iraq, Syria), "radical Islamist" (for Iran and Libya), "patriarchal-conservative" (for Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia), and "authoritarian-privatizing" (for Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey). Most of these states have strong capitalistic features, while some retain feudalistic features. In this book I use "neopatriarchal state," adopted from Hisham Sharabi, as an umbrella term for the various state types in the Middle East.[21] In the neopatriarchal state, unlike liberal or social democratic societies, religion is bound to power and state authority; moreover, the family, rather than the individual, constitutes the universal building block of the community. The neopatriarchal state and the patriarchal family reflect and reinforce each other. For Sharabi, "the most advanced and functional aspect of the neopatriarchal state . . . is its internal security apparatus, the *mukhabarat*. . . . In social practice ordinary citizens not only are arbitrarily deprived of some of their basic rights but are the virtual prisoners of the state, the objects of its capricious and ever-present violence. . . . It is in many ways no more than a modernized version of the traditional patriarchal sultanate."[22] Although the 1990s saw the beginnings of political liberalization and quasi-democratization, MENA states remain authoritarian and citizen participation limited.

In the Middle East there is a variable mix of religion and politics. Although Turkey is the only country in the region with a constitutional separation of religion and the state, Islam is not a state religion in Syria, whose constitution provides that "freedom of religion shall be preserved, and the state shall respect all religions and guarantee freedom of worship to all, pro-

vided that public order is not endangered." Syria's Muslim majority coexists with a Christian minority totaling about 12 percent of the population. Christian holidays are recognized in the same way as Muslim holidays. Syria observes Friday rest but also allows time off for Christian civil servants to attend Sunday religious services. The constitution also guarantees women "every opportunity to participate effectively and completely in political, social, economic, and cultural life." In Syria, as in many countries in the region, urban women, especially those who are educated and professional, enjoy a degree of freedom comparable to their counterparts in, for example, Latin American countries. But it is difficult to reconcile women's rights with Islamic law (Shari'a), which remains unfavorable to women with regard to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Most of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa are governed to some degree by the Shari'a. This is especially the case in the area of family law, although in some countries the penal code is also based on Islamic law. In the Jewish state of Israel, family law is based on the Halacha and supervised by the rabbinate. Tunisia modernized its family law immediately after independence, and further reforms were adopted in 1993. Turkey's family law was not based on Islam but was quite conservative nonetheless, until the women's movement forced changes in 2001. Elsewhere, family laws based on Islamic texts continue to govern the personal and family status of women, and hence confer on them second-class citizenship.

This second-class citizenship is illustrated in Tables 1.1 and 1.2, which offer economic and political indicators relevant to an understanding of women's legal status and social standing in the region, and compared to other regions.

**Table 1.1 Female Economic Activity Rates by Region, 2000**

| | Rate (%) | Index (1990 = 100) | As % of Male Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arab states | 32.9 | 117 | 41 |
| East Asia and the Pacific | 68.9 | 99 | 82 |
| Latin America and the Caribbean | 42.0 | 108 | 51 |
| South Asia | 43.3 | 106 | 51 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 62.3 | 99 | 73 |
| Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS (former Soviet Union) | 57.8 | 99 | 81 |

*Source:* UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), tab. 25, p. 237.

*Note:* The category "Arab states" excludes Iran and Turkey.



**Table 1.2 Women's Political Participation, MENA in Comparative Perspective**

| | % Parliamentary Seats in Single or Lower-Level Chamber Occupied by Women | | | % Women in Decisionmaking Positions in Government | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Ministerial Level | | Subministerial Level | |
| | 1987 | 1995 | 1999 | 1994 | 1998 | 1994 | 1998 |
| MENA | | | | | | | |
| Algeria | 2 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 8 | 10 |
| Bahrain | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Egypt | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 4 |
| Iran | 1 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Iraq | 13 | 11 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Israel | 8 | 9 | 12 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 9 |
| Jordan | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Kuwait | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Lebanon | | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Libya | | | | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Morocco | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Oman | | | | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Qatar | | | | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Saudi Arabia | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sudan | 8 | 8 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Syria | 9 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| Tunisia | 6 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 14 | 10 |
| Turkey | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 17 |
| UAE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Yemen | | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | | | | | | | |
| Argentina | 5 | 22 | 28 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 9 |
| Brazil | 5 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 11 | 13 |
| Chile | | 8 | 11 | 13 | 13 | 0 | 8 |
| China | 21 | 21 | 22 | 6 | | 4 | |
| Cuba | 34 | 23 | 28 | 0 | 5 | 9 | 11 |
| Malaysia | 5 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 16 | 0 | 13 |
| Mexico | 11 | 14 | 17 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 7 |
| Philippines | 9 | 9 | 12 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 19 |
| South Africa | 2 | 25 | 30 | 6 | | 2 | |
| Venezuela | 4 | 6 | 13 | 11 | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| Vietnam | 18 | 18 | 26 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 |

*Source:* United Nations, *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics 2000* (New York: United Nations), tab. 6A.

*Note:* Blank spaces indicate data not available.

Given the range of socioeconomic and political conditions, it follows that gender is not fixed and unchanging in the Middle East (and neither is culture). As this book will document, there exists intra-regional differentiation in gender norms, as measured by differences in women's legal status, education levels, fertility trends, employment patterns, and political participation. For

example, gender segregation in public is the norm and the law in Saudi Arabia but not in Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, or Syria. Following the Iranian Revolution, the new authorities prohibited abortion, discouraged contraception, and lowered the age of marriage for girls to puberty. Not surprisingly, fertility rates soared in the 1980s (though they dropped in the late 1990s after a policy change). But in Tunisia contraceptive use was widespread in the 1980s and the average age of marriage for women was, and remains, twenty-four. Afghanistan has the highest rate of female illiteracy among Muslim countries, but the state took important steps after the revolution of April 1978 to expand educational facilities and income-generating activities for women (although setbacks occurred when Islamists took power in the early 1990s). Turkish women were given the right to vote in 1930, and in the 1950s and 1960s women began to occupy a large share of high-status occupations such as law, medicine, and university appointments. And, as seen in Table 1.2, women's participation in government as key decisionmakers and as members of parliament varies across the region. In almost all MENA countries, women vote, run for parliament, and are appointed to governmental positions. About 25 percent of judges in Algeria and Tunisia are women, whereas some other MENA countries still ban women from judicial positions.

If all the countries we are studying are predominantly Muslim (save Israel), and if the legal status and social positions of women are variable, then logically Islam and culture are not the principal determinants of their status. Of course, Islam can be stronger in some cases than in others, but what I wish to show in this book is that women's roles and status are structurally determined by state ideology (regime orientation and juridical system), level and type of economic development (extent of industrialization, urbanization, proletarianization, and position in the world system), and class location. A sex/gender system informed by Islam may be identified, but to ascribe principal explanatory power to religion and culture is methodologically deficient, as it exaggerates their influence and renders them timeless and unchanging. Religions and cultural specificities do shape gender systems, but they are not the most significant determinants and are themselves subject to change. The content of gender systems is also subject to change.

## A Framework for Analysis: Gender, Class, the State, Development

The theoretical framework that informs this study rests on the premise that stability and change in the status of women are shaped by the following structural determinants: the sex/gender system, class, and economic development and state policies that operate within the capitalist world system.



### *The Gender System*

Marxist-feminists first used the term "sexual division of labor" to refer to the ideological and material ordering of roles, rights, and values in the family, the workplace, and the society that have their origins in male-female sexual difference and especially in women's reproductive capacity. They pointed out that patriarchy, a system of male dominance over women, historically has coexisted with modes of production, and that women's status has been affected by both the sexual division of labor and class divisions corresponding to modes of production. Today the term "gender" is used more broadly to denote the meanings given to masculine and feminine, asymmetrical power relations between the sexes, and the ways that men and women are differently situated in and affected by social processes. Judith Lorber defines gender as "a process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddedness in the family, the workplace, and the state, as well as in sexuality, language, and culture."[23] Lorber and other feminists regard gender as a powerful source of social distinctions, while also recognizing that gender differences are elaborated by class and, where relevant, by race and ethnicity.

Combining the Marxist-feminist and sociological perspectives leads to an understanding of the sex/gender system as a cultural construct that is itself constituted by social structure. That is to say, gender systems are differently manifested in kinship-ordered, agrarian, developing, and advanced industrialized settings. Type of political regime and state ideology further influence the gender system. States that are Marxist (for example, Cuba or the former German Democratic Republic), liberal democratic (the United States), social democratic (the Nordic countries), or neopatriarchal (Islamic Republic of Iran) have had quite different laws about women and different policies on the family.[24]

The thesis that women's relative lack of economic power is the most important determinant of gender inequalities, including those of marriage, parenthood, and sexuality, is cogently demonstrated by Rae Blumberg and Janet Chafetz, among others. The division of labor by gender at the macro (societal) level reinforces that of the household. This dynamic is an important source of women's disadvantaged position and of the stability of the gender system. Another important source is juridical and ideological. In most contemporary societal arrangements, "masculine" and "feminine" are defined by law and custom; men and women have unequal access to political power and economic resources, and cultural images and representations of women are fundamentally distinct from those of men—even in societies formally committed to social (including gender) equality. Inequalities are learned and taught, and "the non-perception of disadvantages of a deprived group helps to

perpetuate those disadvantages."[25] Many governments do not take an active interest in improving women's status and opportunities, and not all countries have active and autonomous women's organizations to protect and further women's interests and rights. High fertility rates limit women's roles and perpetuate gender inequality. Where official and popular discourses stress sexual differences rather than legal equality, an apparatus exists to create stratification based on gender. The legal system, educational system, and labor market are all sites of the construction and reproduction of gender inequality and the continuing subordination of women.

According to Hanna Papanek, "Gender differences, based on the social construction of biological sex distinctions, are one of the great 'fault lines' of societies—those marks of difference among categories of persons that govern the allocation of power, authority, and resources." Contemporary gender systems are often designed by ideologues and inscribed in law, justified by custom and enforced by policy, sustained by processes of socialization and reinforced through distinct institutions. But gender differences are not the only "fault lines"; they operate within a larger matrix of other socially constructed distinctions, such as class, ethnicity, religion, and age, that give them their specific dynamics in a given time and place. Gender is thus not a homogeneous category. To paraphrase Michael Mann, gender is stratified and stratification is gendered.[26] Nor is the gender system static. In the Middle East, the sex/gender system, while still patriarchal, has undergone change.

### Class

Class constitutes a basic unit of social life and thus of social research. Class is here understood in the Marxist sense as determined by ownership or control of the means of production; social classes also have differential access to political power and the state. Class location shapes cultural practices, patterns of consumption, lifestyle, reproduction, and even worldview. As Ralph Miliband put it, class divisions "find expression in terms of power, income, wealth, responsibility, 'life chances,' style and quality of life, and everything else that makes up the texture of existence."[27] Class shapes women's roles in the sphere of production, and it shapes women's choices and behavior in reproduction.

In the highly stratified MENA societies, social-class location, along with state action and economic development, acts upon gender relations and women's social positions. Although state-sponsored education has resulted in a certain amount of upward social mobility and has increased the number of women seeking jobs, women's access to resources, including education, is largely determined by their class location. That a large percentage of urban employed women in the Middle East are found in the services sector or in professional positions can be understood by examining class. As in other third world regions where social disparities are great, upper-middle-class urban women in the Middle East can exercise a greater number of choices and thus become much more "emancipated" than lower-middle-class, working-class, urban poor, or peasant women. In 1971, Constantina Safilios-Rothschild wrote that women could fulfill conflicting professional and marital roles with the help of cheap domestic labor and the extended family network.[28] In 2002 this observation was still true for women from wealthy families, although middle-class women in most of the large Middle Eastern countries are less likely to be able to afford domestic help in these post-oil-boom days and more likely to rely on a mother or mother-in-law. As Margot Badran has noted, whereas some states are committed to women's participation in industrial production (e.g., Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey), the system extracts the labor of women in economic need without giving them the social services to coordinate their productive roles in the family and workplace.[29]

Economic development has led to the growth of the middle class, especially the salaried middle class. The middle class in Middle Eastern countries is internally differentiated; there is a traditional middle class of shopkeepers, small bazaaris, and the self-employed—what Marxists call the traditional petty bourgeoisie. There is also a more modern salaried middle class, persons employed in the government sector or in the private sector as teachers, lawyers, engineers, administrators, secretaries, nurses, doctors, and so on. But this modern salaried middle class is itself differentiated culturally, for many of its members are children of the traditional petty bourgeoisie. The political implications are profound, for Islamist movements evidently have recruited from the more traditional sections of the contemporary middle class: the petty bourgeoisie and the most conservative elements of the professional middle class.

### Economic Development and State Policies

Since the 1960s and 1970s the Middle East has been participant in a global process variously called the internationalization of capital, the new (or changing) international division of labor, global Fordism, and globalization. National development plans, domestic industrialization projects, and foreign investment led to significant changes in the structure of the labor force, including an expansion of nonagricultural employment. Oil revenues assisted industrial development projects, which also led to new employment opportunities and changes in the occupational structure. The Middle East has historically been a region with thriving cities, but increased urbanization and rural-urban migration since the 1950s occurred in tandem with changes in the economy and in property relations. Property ownership patterns changed concomitantly from being based almost exclusively on land or merchant capital to being based on the ownership of large-scale industrial units and more com-

plex and international forms of commercial and financial capital. The process of structural transformation and the nearly universal shift toward the nonagrarian urban sector in economic and social terms produced new class actors and undermined (though it did not destroy) the old. Industrial workers, a salaried middle class, and large-scale capitalists are products of and participants in economic development. Mass education and bureaucratic expansion led to prodigious growth in the new middle class; the creation and absorption into the public sector of important productive, commercial, and banking assets spawned a new managerial state bourgeoisie.[30] Other classes and strata affected by economic development and state expansion have been the peasantry, rural landowning class, urban merchant class, and traditional petty bourgeoisie. High population growth rates, coupled with rural-urban migration, concentrated larger numbers of semiproletarians, informal workers, and the unemployed in major urban areas.

In the heyday of economic development, most of the large MENA countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, embarked on a development strategy of import-substitution industrialization (ISI), where machinery was imported to run local industries producing consumer goods. This strategy was associated with an economic system characterized by central planning and a large public sector. State expansion, economic development, oil wealth, and the region's increased integration within the world system combined to create educational and employment opportunities for women in the Middle East. For about ten years after the oil price increases of the early 1970s, a massive investment program by the oil-producing nations affected the structure of the labor force not only within the relevant countries but throughout the region as a result of labor migration. The urban areas saw an expansion of the female labor force, with women occupying paid positions as workers and professionals. The state played a central role in the development process.

Indeed, between the 1950s and 1980s, the third world state was a major actor in the realization of social and economic development. As such, the state had a principal part in the formulation of social policies, development strategies, and legislation that shaped opportunities for women. Family law; affirmative action-type policies; protective legislation regarding working mothers; policies on education, health, and population; and other components of social policy designed by state managers have affected women's status and gender arrangements. Strong states with the capacity to enforce laws may undermine customary discrimination and patriarchal structures—or they may reinforce them. The state can enable or impede the integration of women citizens in public life. As Jean Pyle found for the Republic of Ireland, state policy can have contradictory goals: development of the economy and expansion of services on one hand, maintenance of the "traditional family" on the other.[31] Such contradictory goals could create role conflicts for women, who may find themselves torn between the economic need or desire to work and the gender



ideology that stresses family roles for women. Conversely, economic development and state-sponsored education could have unintended consequences: the ambivalence of neopatriarchal state managers notwithstanding, there is now a generation and stratum of educated women who actively pursue employment and political participation in defiance of cultural norms and gender ideologies.

The positive relationship between women's education and nonagricultural employment is marked throughout the Middle East. Census data reveal that each increase in the level of education is reflected in a corresponding increase in the level of women's nonagricultural employment and a decrease in fertility. Education seems to increase the aspirations of women in certain sectors of society for higher income and better standards of living.[32] Moreover, it has weakened the restrictive barriers of traditions and increased the propensity of women to join the labor force and public life. These social changes have had a positive effect in reducing traditional sex segregation and female seclusion and in producing a generation of middle-class women who have achieved economic independence and no longer depend on family or marriage for survival and status.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize the limits to change—including those imposed by a country's or a region's location within the economic zones of the capitalist world system. Development strategies and state economic policies are not formulated in a vacuum; they are greatly influenced, for better or for worse, by world-systemic imperatives. Although most of the large MENA countries are semiperiphery countries, the function of the region within the world system thus far has been to guarantee a steady supply of oil for foreign, especially core-country, markets, and to import industrial goods, especially armaments, mainly from core countries. One result has been limited industrialization and manufacturing for export. Another result has been limited employment opportunities for women in the formal industrial sector, as capital-intensive industries and technologies tend to favor male labor. And since the 1980s, socioeconomic problems have bedeviled the region, with wide-ranging implications for women.

The section that follows examines in more detail the gender dynamics of social change in the region—and, by extension, the organization of this book.

## Social Changes and Women in the Middle East

One of the ways societies influence each other economically, politically, and culturally is through international labor migration, which also has distinct gender-specific effects. In the Middle East and North Africa, oil-fueled development encouraged labor migration from labor-surplus and capital-poor economies to capital-rich and labor-deficit oil economies. For example, there

was substantial Tunisian migrant labor in Libya, Egyptian and Palestinian migrant labor in the Gulf emirates, and Yemeni labor in Saudi Arabia. This migration affected, among other things, the structure of populations, the composition of the households, and the economies of both sending and receiving countries. Many of the oil-rich Gulf states came to have large populations of noncitizens, and female-headed households proliferated in the labor-sending countries. During the years of the oil boom, roughly until the mid-1980s, workers' remittances were an important factor in not only the welfare of families and households but also in the fortunes of economies such as Jordan's and Egypt's. Labor migration to areas outside the Middle East has been undertaken principally by North Africans and Turks. Historically, North Africans have migrated to the cities of France, although large populations of Moroccans have settled in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain as well. And in the late 1980s Italy became another destination for North African migrant workers. Turkish "guest workers" have been an important source of labor to (West) German capital since the 1950s.

Labor migration may be functional for the economies of the host country (in that it receives cheap labor) and the sending country (in that unemployment is reduced and capital inflows through workers' remittances are increased); emigration, especially of professionals (the so-called brain drain) also may be advantageous to receiving countries. Like exile, however, labor migration and emigration have other consequences, including social-psychological, cultural, and political effects. In the case of Iran—characterized by the brain drain of Iranian professionals following the 1953 Shah-CIA coup d'état, the massive exodus of students to the West in the 1960s and 1970s, a second wave of emigration and exile following Islamization, and the proliferation of draft-dodgers in the mid-1980s—the society became fractured and contentious. When, in 1978–1979, tens of thousands of Iranian students in the United States and Europe returned en masse to help construct the new Iran, they brought with them both organizational and leadership skills learned in the anti-Shah student movement *and* a secular, left-wing political-cultural orientation that put them at odds with the Islamists.[33]

Exile, emigration, and refugee status almost always result in changes in attitudes and behavior, but whether these changes improve or worsen women's lot depends on many intervening factors. In the refugee camps on the Algeria-Morocco border, where 160,000 Sahrawis have lived for some two decades, the women who make up three-quarters of the adult population have played a central role in running the camps from the time of their arrival. They set up committees for health, education, local production, social affairs, and provisions distribution.[34] Janet Bauer informs us that among Algerian Muslim immigrants in France, women have a strong role in maintaining religious rituals and symbolic meanings that are important in preserving cultural identity and adaptation. The same is true for many Turkish residents in Germany. The situation for Iranian refugees, exiles, and immigrants seems to differ, however, as they may be ambivalent about the very traditions and religious rituals from which individuals are said to seek comfort in times of crisis or change. Socioeconomic status and political ideology may also explain differences between Algerian, Turkish, and Iranian immigrants. In her study of Iranian immigrants in France, Vida Nassehy-Behnam states: "Since the initiation of 'theocracy,' Iranian emigration in general has been partly motivated by the pervasiveness of a religious ideology which impinges so dramatically upon individual lifestyles." She then offers two categories of emigrants: (1) political emigrants—that is, those whose exodus began in February 1979, including monarchists, nationalists, communists, and the Iranian Mujahidin; and (2) sociocultural emigrants, defined as those Iranians who were not politically active to any great extent but left the country out of fear over an uncertain future for their children or because of the morose atmosphere that prevailed in Iran, especially for women and youth. In their study of Iranian exiles and immigrants in Los Angeles, Mehdi Bozorgmehr and Georges Sabagh show that some 65 percent of immigrants and 49 percent of exiles had four or more years of college. These findings for Iranians stand in contrast to the figures for many other migration streams. Another difference between Iranian exiles, refugees, and immigrants and those of North Africa and Turkey is the greater preponderance of religious minorities—Christians, Jews, and Baha'is—among Iranians. Such minorities are especially prevalent within the Iranian exile group in Los Angeles. Bozorgmehr and Sabagh offer these religious patterns as an explanation for why the Iranian exiles they surveyed perceived less prejudice than other groups, which may contain a larger share of Muslims.[35]



These factors—socioeconomic status, education, and political ideology—shape the experience of women exiles, immigrants, and refugees. Bauer notes that although women in Middle Eastern Muslim societies are rarely described as migrating alone, many Iranian women do go into exile alone. The women she interviewed in Germany typically had been involved in secular-left political and feminist activities in Iran; many had high school or college educations. She elaborates: "Some married young in traditional marriages; others were single or divorced. Some were working class; others middle or upper middle class . . . but most of those I interviewed did come into exile with some ideas about increasing personal autonomy and choice."[36]

Can there be emancipation through emigration? Bauer notes the growing feminist consciousness of Iranian exiles and writes that among those she interviewed, there was a general feeling that the traumatic events of 1979–1982 had initiated cross-class feminist cooperation among women and rising consciousness among all Iranians on the issue of gender relations. She adds that larger political goals may be lost, however, as people put aside notions of socialist revolution, social transformation, and political activity and wrap

themselves in introspection and their individual lives. Although this was true for the early 1990s, a repoliticization occurred in the latter part of the 1990s, in tandem with the emergence of a movement for political reform within Iran. Expatriate Iranians have regained their political identity and aspirations, with different perspectives on the reform movement, "Islamic feminism," prospects for "Islamic democracy," secularism, and other political alternatives.

The key elements of social change that are usually examined are economic structure and, tied to that, class and property relations. The major source of social change in the Middle East in the post–World War II period has been the dual process of economic development and state expansion. There can be no doubt that over the past fifty years, the economic systems of the region have undergone modernization and growth, with implications for social structure (including the stratification system), the nature and capacity of the state, and the position of women. Much of this economic modernization was based on income from oil, and some came from foreign investment and capital inflows. Economic development alters the status of women in different ways across nations and classes. How women have been involved in and affected by economic development is the subject of Chapter 2. As the state is the manager of economic development in almost all cases, and as state economic and legal policies shape women's access to employment and economic resources, this chapter underscores the government's role in directing development and its impact on women. It also examines shifting state policies in an era of globalization, and their effects on women's employment and economic status.

Another source of social change is revolution, whether large-scale social revolutions or more limited political revolutions. In some Middle Eastern countries, notably Saudi Arabia, change comes about slowly and is carefully orchestrated by the ruling elite. But where revolutions occur, change comes about rapidly and dramatically, with unintended consequences for the masses and the leadership alike. Revolutions have resulted in strong, centralized states whose programs may or may not be in accord with the spirit of the revolutionary coalition (as in the case of the Iranian Revolution). Still, modernizing revolutionary states have been crucial agents in the advancement of women by enacting changes in family law, providing education and employment, and encouraging women's participation in public life. For example, the Iraqi Ba'th regime in its radical phase (1960s and 1970s) undertook social transformation by introducing a land reform program that changed the conditions of the peasantry and by establishing a welfare state for the urban working classes and the poor. In its drive against illiteracy and for free education, the Ba'thist revolution produced one of the best-educated intelligentsias in the Arab world. Even a hostile study of Iraq credited the regime with giving women the right to have careers and participate in civic activities.[37] Such radical measures effected by states and legitimized in political ideologies have



been important factors in weakening the hold of traditional kinship systems on women—even though the latter remain resilient. On the other hand, weak states may be unable to implement their ambitious programs for change. The case of Afghanistan is especially illustrative of the formidable social-structural and international hurdles that may confront a revolutionary state and of the implications of these constraints for gender and the status of women. The sociology of revolution has not considered changes in the status of women as a consequence of revolution and has so far been oblivious to the overriding importance of the "woman question" to revolutionaries and reformers. Chapter 3 examines the effect of radical reforms and revolutions in the Middle East on the legal status and social positions of women, including variations in family law. This chapter underscores the gender dynamics of reforms and revolutionary changes, with a view also to correcting an oversight in the sociology of revolution.

Political conflict or war can also bring about social change, including change in the economic and political status of women, a heightened sense of gender awareness, and political activism on the part of women. World War II has been extensively analyzed in terms of gender and social change. Wartime conditions radically transformed the position of women in the work force. Ruth Milkman notes that virtually overnight, the economic mobilization in the United States produced changes that advocates of gender equality both before and since have spent decades struggling for.[38] Postwar demobilization rapidly restored the prewar sexual division of labor, and American culture redefined woman's place in terms of the now famous "feminine mystique." But it is also true that in many Western countries involved in World War II, female labor force participation rose rapidly in the postwar decades. Some authors have begun exploring the complex relationship between gender, consciousness, and social change, suggesting a strong link between the wartime experience and the emergence, two decades later, of the second wave of feminism. The Middle East has encountered numerous wars and political conflicts since the 1950s, with varying implications for societies and for women. In some cases, an unexpected outcome of economic crisis caused by war could be higher education and employment opportunities for women. A study conducted by a professor of education at the Lebanese University suggests that Lebanese parents feel more strongly that educating their daughters is now a good investment, as higher education represents a financial asset. In addition to offering better work opportunities and qualifications for a "better" husband, a degree acts as a safety net should a woman's marriage fail or should she remain single.

In a study I undertook of women's employment patterns in postrevolutionary Iran in 1986, I was surprised to discover that, notwithstanding the exhortations of Islamist ideologues, women had not been driven out of the work force and their participation in government employment had slightly

increased relative to 1976. This I attributed to the imperatives of the wartime economy, the manpower needs of the expanding state apparatus, and women's resistance to subordination.[39] A recent study by Maryam Poya confirmed my hypothesis. She found that the mobilization of men at the war front, and the requirements of gender segregation, had resulted in an increased need for female teachers and nurses.[40] In Iraq the mobilization of female labor accelerated during the war with Iran, though this was apparently coupled with the contradictory exhortation to produce more children.[41]

The most obvious case of the impact of political conflict is that of the Palestinians, whose expulsion by Zionists or flight from their villages during periods of strife caused changes in rural Palestinian life and the structure of the family.[42] The prolonged uprising, which has organized and mobilized so many Palestinians, had a positive impact on women's roles, inasmuch as women were able to participate politically in what was once the most secular and democratic movement in the Arab world. Internationally, the best-known Palestinian women have been the guerrilla fighter Leila Khaled and the negotiator and English professor Hanan Ashrawi—two contrasting examples of roles available to Palestinian women in their movement. In the 1970s Palestinian women's political activity and participation in resistance groups expanded, whether in Lebanon, the West Bank, Gaza, universities, or refugee camps. And during the first intifada, or uprising against occupation, which began in 1987, Palestinian women organized themselves into impressive independent political groups and economic cooperatives. A feminist consciousness became more visible among Palestinian women, and some Palestinian women writers, such as Samira Azzam and Fadwa Tuqan, combined a critique of patriarchal structures and a fervent nationalism to produce compelling work. Likewise, the long civil war in Lebanon produced not only suffering and destruction but a remarkable body of literature with strong themes of social and gender consciousness. Miriam Cooke's analysis of the war writings of the "Beirut Decentrists" in the late 1970s and early 1980s shows the emergence of a feminist school of women writers. Indeed, Cooke's argument is that what has been seen as the first Arab women's literary school is in fact feminist.[43]

At the same time, the Palestinian movement has exalted women as mothers and as mothers of martyrs. This emphasis on their reproductive role has created a tension on which a number of authors have commented. During the latter part of the 1980s, another trend emerged among the Palestinians, especially in the impoverished Gaza Strip: Islamist vigilantes who insisted that women cover themselves when appearing in public. The frustrations of daily life, the indignities of occupation, and the inability of the secular and democratic project to materialize may explain this shift. What began as a sophisticated women's movement in the early 1990s that sought feminist interventions in the areas of constitution-writing and social policy experienced



setbacks toward the end of the decade, as the West Bank and Gaza faced Islamization and continued Israeli occupation.[44] As noted by Zahira Kamal, a leading figure in the women's movement, "Palestinian women are prisoners of a concept of 'women and the intifada.'"[45]

One important dimension of social change in the region has been the weakening of the patriarchal family and traditional kinship systems. Demographic changes, including patterns of marriage and fertility behavior, have followed from state-sponsored economic development, state-directed legal reforms, and women's educational attainment. Industrialization, urbanization, and proletarianization have disrupted kinship-based structures, with their gender and age hierarchies. In some cases, revolutionary states have undermined patriarchal structures, or attempted to do so, through legislation aimed at weakening traditional rural landlord structures or the power of tribes. Often this type of change comes about coercively. Whether changes to the patriarchal family structures come about gradually and nonviolently or rapidly and coercively, the implications for the status of women within the family and in the society are profound. Yet most MENA states have been ambivalent about transforming women and the family. They have sought the apparently contradictory goals of economic development and strengthening of the family. The latter objective is often a bargain struck with more conservative social elements, such as religious leaders or traditional local communities. Changes in the patriarchal social structure, the contradictory role of the neopatriarchal state, and the profound changes occurring to the structure of the family are examined in Chapter 4.

One of the most vexed issues of the region, with significant implications for the rise of Islamism and the question of women, is the nonresolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A deep sense of injustice directed at Zionist actions and U.S. imperialism pervades the region. In Iran the 1953 CIA-sponsored coup d'état against the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and subsequent U.S. support for the second Pahlavi monarch linger in collective memory. That the Shah gave Israel near-diplomatic status in Iran in the 1960s was also used against him during the Iranian Revolution. Significantly, one of the first acts of the new revolutionary regime in Iran in 1979 was to invite Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) chairman Yasir Arafat to Tehran and hand over the former Israeli legation building to the PLO. Throughout the region—in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Algeria—large segments of the population find the displacement of fellow Arabs or Muslims (Palestinians) and the intrigues of Israel and the United States an enormous affront. Although this sense of moral outrage is common to liberals, leftists, and Islamists alike, it is typically strongest among Islamists, who make the elimination of Zionism, the liberation of Jerusalem, humiliation of the United States, and other such aspirations major goals and slogans of their movements—as we saw with Al-Qaida and the events of September 11, 2001.

The implications for women are significant, inasmuch as anti-Zionist, anti-imperialist, and especially Islamist movements are preoccupied with questions of cultural identity and authenticity. As women play a crucial role in the socialization of the next generation, they become symbols of cultural values and traditions. Some Muslim women regard this role as an exalted one, and they gladly assume it, becoming active participants, in some cases ideologues, in Islamist movements. Other women find it an onerous burden; they resent restrictions on their autonomy, individuality, mobility, and range of choices. In some countries, these nonconformist women pursue education, employment, and foreign travel to the extent that they can, joining women's associations or political organizations in opposition to Islamist movements. In Algeria, the Islamist movement spurred a militant feminist movement, something that did not exist before. In other, more authoritarian countries, nonconformist women face legal restrictions on dress, occupation, travel, and encounters with men outside their own families. Their response can take the form of resentful acquiescence, passive resistance, or self-exile. This response was especially strong among middle-class Iranian women during the 1980s, although in the 1990s women began to challenge the gender system and patriarchal Islamist norms more directly. The emergence of Islamist movements and women's varied responses, including feminist responses, is examined in Chapter 5.

To veil or not to veil has been a recurring issue in Muslim countries. Polemics surrounding hijab (modest Islamic dress for women) abound in every country. During the era of early modernization and nation building, national progress and the emancipation of women were considered synonymous. This viewpoint entailed discouragement of the veil and encouragement of schooling for girls. The veil was associated with national backwardness, as well as female illiteracy and subjugation. But a paradox of the 1980s was that more and more educated women, even working women (especially in Egypt), took to the veil. It is true that the veil has been convenient to militants and political activists. For example, in the Algerian war for independence against the French and the Iranian Revolution against the Shah, women used the *chador,* or all-encompassing veil, to hide political leaflets and arms. But is veiling always a matter of individual choice, or does social pressure also play a part? In the case of compulsory veiling in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Afghanistan under the Taliban, the answer is clear. But what of the expansion of veiling in Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, and among the Palestinians? Chapter 5 takes up this question as well.

Certainly there are Islamist women activists—as well as secular feminists and Islamic feminists. Much of feminist scholarship over the past twenty years has sought to show that women are not simply passive recipients of the effects of social change. They are agents, too; women as well as men are makers of history and builders of movements and societies. This holds equally true



for the Middle East and North Africa. Women are actively involved in movements for social change—revolution, national liberation, human rights, women's rights, and democratization. Besides national groupings, there are regionwide organizations and networks within which women are active, such as the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, the Arab Human Rights Organization, and Women Living Under Muslim Laws, a transnational feminist network. Women are also actively involved in support of and against Islamist/fundamentalist movements. Islamist women are discernible by their dress, the Islamic hijab. Anti-fundamentalist women are likewise discernible by their dress, which is Western, and by their liberal or left-wing political views. In between are Muslim women who may veil but are also opposed to second-class citizenship for women. All in all, women in the Middle East, North Africa, and Afghanistan have participated in political organizations, social movements, and revolutions. Women also have been involved in productive processes and economic development. Whether as peasants, managers of households, factory workers, service workers, street vendors, teachers, nurses, or professionals, MENA women have contributed significantly to economic production and social reproduction—though their contributions are not always acknowledged, valued, or remunerated.

I have said that political conflicts and war are an important part of the process of social change in the Middle East, with implications for women and gender relations. Apart from the long-standing Arab-Israeli tensions, a conflict in the region that influenced women's positions was the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted eight long years (1980–1988). One result of the war in both countries was the ever-increasing allocation of central government expenditure to defense, at the expense of health, education, and services. Also, during the war women in Iran were constantly harassed by zealots if they did not adhere strictly to Islamic dress and manner. Those women who complained about hijab or resisted by showing a little hair or wearing bright-colored socks were admonished to "feel shame before the corpses of the martyrs of Karbala"—a reference to an incident in religious history as well as to the fallen soldiers in the battle with Iraq. However, as mentioned above, an unintended consequence of the war was to override early ideological objections to female employment in the civil service. As the state apparatus proliferated, and as a large proportion of the male population was concentrated at the war front, women found opportunities for employment in the government sector that Islamist ideologues had earlier denied them. Eventually, the war had a deteriorating effect on employment for both men and women. Yet today the Iranian authorities actively encourage women to take up fields of study and employment they deem both socially necessary and appropriate for women, especially medicine and teaching. Meanwhile, Iranian women themselves are making major demands for the modernization of family law and for greater political participation.

Iran constitutes one of the two case studies in this book. The Iranian case deserved further amplification because of its fascinating trajectory from a deeply patriarchal and very repressive theocracy to a parliamentary Islamic republic in which liberals and Islamic feminists are becoming increasingly vocal and visible. (It is also the case of women and social change with which I am most personally involved.) Thus Chapter 6 examines the contradictions of Islamization and the changing status of women in Iran. The subject of Chapter 7 is the prolonged battle over women's rights in Afghanistan. The Afghan case needed its own chapter, too, if only to place the Marxist-inspired reforms of 1978 in proper historical and social context and to show how the subversion of a modernizing state by an Islamist grouping financed by an international coalition of states led straight to the Taliban.[46] The elaboration of the Afghan case is necessary to demonstrate its gender dimension—occluded in almost all mainstream accounts—and to show its relevance to the study of social change.

This book, therefore, is an exploration of the causes, nature, and direction of change in the Middle East, North Africa, and Afghanistan, particularly as these have affected women's status and social positions. The economic, political, and cultural dimensions of change will be underscored, and the unintended consequences of state policies as they affect women will be highlighted. The chapters will reveal the contradictions and paradoxes of social change, as well as its more predictable patterns and trends. In particular, the chapters draw attention to the potentially revolutionary role of middle-class Middle Eastern women, especially secular feminists and Muslim feminists using the languages of socialism, liberalism, feminism, and an emancipatory Islam. These women are not simply acting out roles prescribed for them by religion, by culture, or by neopatriarchal states; they are questioning their roles and status, demanding social and political change, participating in movements, and taking sides in ideological battles. In particular, they are at the center of the new social movements for democratization, civil society, and citizenship.

## Notes

The opening quote from Asma Barlas is from her book *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), chap. 1.

1. Daniel Chirot, *Social Change in the Modern Era* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 3. For an elaboration of the structuralist and Marxist approach, see Christopher Lloyd, *Explanation in Social History* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), especially pt. 3. On world-system theory, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System,* vol. 3 (San Diego: Academic Press, 1989); and Christopher Chase-Dunn, *Global Formation: Structures of the World-Economy,* 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).



2. But see Sami G. Hajjar, ed., *The Middle East: From Transition to Development* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985). Although the collection is uneven, especially useful are the introduction by Hajjar, the chapter on demography by Basheer Nijim, and the essay on education and political development in the Middle East by Nancy and Joseph Jabbra. See also Nicholas S. Hopkins and Saad Eddin Ibrahim, eds., *Arab Society: Class, Gender, Power, and Development* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1997).

3. David S. Landes and Richard A. Landes, "Do Fundamentalists Fear Our Women?" *New Republic,* September 29, 2001. See also Samuel P. Huntington, "The Age of Muslim Wars," *Newsweek,* January 2002; and Francis Fukuyama, "Their Target: The Modern World," *Newsweek,* January 2002.

4. Pippa Norris and Robert Inglehart, "Religion, Secularization and Gender Equality," mimeo, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. The paper was a preliminary draft from chap. 3 of their book, *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Shifts in the Cultural Zeitgeist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

5. United Nations, *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 2000), chart 5.1, p. 110.

6. Nadia Youssef, "The Status and Fertility Patterns of Muslim Women," in Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, eds., *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 69–99; John Weeks, "The Demography of Islamic Nations," *Population Bulletin* 43 (4) (December 1988): Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society,* rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Ruth Leger Sivard, *Women . . . A World Survey* (Washington, D.C.: World Priorities, 1985); Julinda Abu Nasr, N. Khoury, and H. Azzam, eds., *Women, Employment, and Development in the Arab World* (The Hague: Mouton/ILO, 1985); and Ester Boserup, "Economic Change and the Roles of Women," in Irene Tinker, ed., *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 14–24.

7. See *Al-Raida* (quarterly journal of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Lebanese American University, Beirut) 15 (80–81) (Winter–Spring 1998), a special issue on Arab countries and CEDAW. See also Jane Connors, "The Women's Convention in the Muslim World," in Mai Yamani, ed., *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives* (New York University Press, 1996), pp. 351–371.

8. See contributions in V. M. Moghadam, ed., *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

9. Pnina Lahav, "Raising the Status of Women Through Law: The Case of Israel," in Wellesley Editorial Committee, ed., *Women and National Development: The Complexities of Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 199. See also Shulamit Aloni, "Up the Down Escalator," in Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood Is Global* (New York: Anchor Books, 1984), pp. 360–364; and Madeleine Tress, "Halaka, Zionism, and Gender: The Case of Gush Emunim," in Moghadam, *Identity Politics and Women,* pp. 307–328.

10. Urvashi Boutalia, "Indian Women and the New Movement," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8 (2) (1985): 131–133; Barbara Miller, *The Endangered Sex* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); and Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), esp. chap. 4.

11. See Vern Bullough, Brenda Shelton, and Sarah Slavin, *The Subordinated Sex: A History of Attitudes Toward Women* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

12. Azar Tabari, "Islam and the Struggle for Emancipation of Iranian Women," and Haleh Afshar, "Khomeini's Teachings and Their Implications for Iranian Women," both in Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh, eds., *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's*

*Movement in Iran* (London: Zed Books, 1982), pp. 5–25 and 75–90; Mai Ghoussoub, "Feminism—or the Eternal Masculine—in the Arab World," *New Left Review* 161 (January–February 1987): 3–13; Juliette Minces, *The House of Obedience* (London: Zed Books, 1982); and Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

13. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil;* and Fatna A. Sabbah, *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985).

14. Freda Hussein distinguishes "authentic Islam" from "pseudo-Islam" and believes that the former is emancipatory. See her introduction in Freda Hussein, ed., *Muslim Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1984). Leila Ahmed once poignantly wrote, "One can perhaps appreciate how excruciating is the plight of the Middle-Eastern feminist caught between those opposing loyalties [sexual and cultural identities] forced almost to choose between betrayal and betrayal." See her essay in Hussein, *Muslim Women.* See also Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Riffat Hassan, "Rights of Women Within Islamic Communities," in John Witte Jr. and Johan D. van der Vyver, eds., *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1996), pp. 361–386; and Azizah al-Hibri, "Islam, Law and Custom: Redefining Muslim Women's Rights," *American University Journal of International Law & Policy* 12 (1) (1997): 1–43.

15. Yakin Ertürk, "Convergence and Divergence in the Status of Muslim Women: The Cases of Turkey and Saudi Arabia," *International Sociology* 6 (1) (September 1991): 307–320. For critiques of the cultural relativist approach, see also Mona Abaza and Georg Stauth, "Occidental Reason, Orientalism, and Islamic Fundamentalism," *International Sociology* 3 (4) (December 1988): 343–364.

16. Multicultural policies were first criticized in the early 1990s by feminists in the UK associated with Women Against Fundamentalism and Southall Black Sisters. See also Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, and Martha C. Nussbaum, eds., *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* with Susan Moller Okin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

17. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

18. See Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Office at Vienna, "International Standards of Equality and Religious Freedom: Implications for the Status of Women," in Moghadam, *Identity Politics and Women,* pp. 425–438.

19. Abdullahi an-Na'im, "Promises We Should Keep in Common Cause," in Cohen, Howard, and Nussbaum, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* pp. 59–64.

20. Janet Z. Giele, "Introduction: The Status of Women in Comparative Perspective," in Janet Z. Giele and Audrey C. Smock, eds., *Women: Roles and Status in Eight Countries* (New York: John Wiley, 1977), pp. 3–31.

21. Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in the Arab World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Another useful discussion of the state is contained in Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East,* 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996). And still relevant is Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

22. Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy,* p. 145.

23. Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 5.

24. For a comparative study of changing family law in Western countries (from patriarchal to egalitarian), see Mary Ann Glendon, *State, Law, and Family: Family Law in Transition in the United States and Western Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); and Mary Ann Glendon, *The Transformation of Family Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).



25. Hanna Papanek, "Socialization for Inequality: Entitlements, the Value of Women, and Domestic Hierarchies," Center for Asian Studies, Boston University, 1989. See also Rae Lesser Blumberg, *Stratification: Socio-Economic and Sexual Inequality* (Dubuque, Iowa: W. C. Brown, 1978); and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Sex and Advantage* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984).

26. Michael Mann, "A Crisis in Stratification Theory? Persons, Households/Family/Lineages, Genders, Classes, and Nations," in Rosemary Crompton and Michael Mann, eds., *Gender and Stratification* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1986), pp. 40–56. The quote by Papanek is from her paper "Socialization for Inequality." On patriarchy, see Chapter 4.

27. Ralph Miliband, *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 25.

28. Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, "A Cross-Cultural Examination of Women's Marital, Educational, and Occupational Options," in M. T. S. Mednick et al., eds., *Women and Achievement* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1971), pp. 96–113.

29. Margot Badran, "Women and Production in the Middle East and North Africa," *Trends in History* 2 (3) (1982): 80.

30. Richards and Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East;* and Massoud Karshenas, *Oil, State, and Industrialization in Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

31. Jean Pyle, "Export-Led Development and the Underdevelopment of Women: The Impact of Discriminatory Development Policy in the Republic of Ireland," in Kathryn Ward, ed., *Women Workers and Global Restructuring* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1990), pp. 85–112.

32. Mary Chamie, *Women of the World: Near East and North Africa* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, and U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Women in Development, 1985); and H. Azzam, Julinda Abu Nasr, and I. Lorfing, "An Overview of Arab Women in Population, Employment, and Economic Development," in Julinda Abu Nasr, A. Khoury, and H. Azzam, eds., *Women, Employment, and Development in the Arab World,* p. 11.

33. The Iranian students abroad were organized in the Confederation of Iranian Students, one of the largest and best-organized student movements anywhere. See Afshin Matin Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda, 2002). See also Val Moghadam, "Socialism or Anti-Imperialism? The Left and Revolution in Iran," *New Left Review* 166 (November–December 1987): 5–28.

34. Helen O'Connell, *Women and the Family* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

35. Mehdi Bozorgmehr and Georges Sabagh, "Iranian Exiles and Immigrants in Los Angeles," in Asghar Fathi, ed., *Iranian Refugees and Exiles Since Khomeini* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda, 1991), pp. 121–144. In the same volume, see also Janet Bauer, "A Long Way Home: Islam in the Adaptation of Iranian Women Refugees in Turkey and West Germany," pp. 77–101; and Vida Nassehy-Behnam, "Iranian Immigrants in France," pp. 102–119.

36. Bauer, "A Long Way Home," p. 93.

37. Samir al-Khalil, "Iraq and Its Future," *New York Review of Books,* April 11, 1991, p. 12. This does of course raise the question of the impact of the Gulf War and devastation of Iraq on women's status. The paucity of information makes a serious study impossible at this time, but the available evidence suggests that the combination of wars, international sanctions, and Saddam Hussein's own flawed policies and priorities have resulted in the deterioration of women's status and conditions.

38. Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); and Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

39. Aisha Harb Zureik, "The Effect of War on University Education," project discussed in *Al-Raida* (Beirut University College) 9 (52) (Winter 1991): 4–5. See also Val Moghadam, "Women, Work, and Ideology in the Islamic Republic," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20 (2) (May 1988): 221–243.

40. Maryam Poya, *Women, Work, and Islamism: Ideology and Resistance in Iran* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

41. Andrea W. Lorenz, "Ishtar Was a Woman," *Ms.*, May–June 1991, pp. 14–15.

42. See Khalil Nakhleh and Elia Zureik, eds., *The Sociology of the Palestinians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

43. Miriam Cooke, *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). See also Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, eds., *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), esp. the book's introduction.

44. Julie Peteet, "Authenticity and Gender: The Presentation of Culture," in Judith Tucker, ed., *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Cheryl Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001); Rema Hammami and Penny Johnson, "Equality with a Difference: Gender and Citizenship in Transition Palestine," *Social Politics* 6 (3) (Fall 1999): 314–343; and Robin Morgan, "Women in the Intifada," in Suha Sabbagh, ed., *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 153–170.

45. Zahira Kamal, "The Development of the Palestinian Women's Movement in the Occupied Territories: Twenty Years after the Israeli Occupation," in Sabbagh, *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank,* pp. 78–88; quote appears on p. 88.

46. For a nongendered account, see John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999, new edition 2000).

# 2

# Economic Development, State Policy, and Women's Employment

*Let me explain this to you. If you want a position, something good, you have to pay a bribe. There is someone, like an agent, like the man you see to rent a house, and he is just for the small jobs in the government, like the police, or work cleaning an office, things like that. You give him money and he looks around for a position for you. Every job has its price, depending on how well it pays. You pay more for jobs that have a higher salary. But if you just want something normal, then you talk to people, you say hello to them everyday, get to know them, and see if they can find something for you. That is for the regular jobs, the ones that pay just 500 dirhams a month, things in a store or in a beauty shop. For a job with a good salary, you have to pay the agent. Maybe you will get something, and then he can have an offer for that job from someone else, and he can get you put out and he will put someone else there.*

—Rabia, a twenty-four-year-old
working-class woman, Marrakech, 2001

*Women have invaded the public space: the markets, the streets, public transport, even airplanes. Women are today fruit and vegetable vendors, run second-hand clothes stores, are hairdressers and photographers; there is even a female butcher and at least one taxi-driver. They operate in the open in an area where a decade ago the philosophy of religious extremists projecting the distorted image of women's role and place was rampant, and women largely confined to an "inside" role.*

—Essma Ben Hamida,
ENDA Inter-Arabe, March 2000

The position of women within the labor market is frequently studied as an empirical measure of women's status. Access to remunerative work in the formal sector of the economy—as distinct from outwork, housework, or other types of informal-sector activities—is regarded by many feminists and researchers in the field of women-in-development (WID) and gender-and-development (GAD) as an important indicator of women's social positions and legal status. For those who argue that women's economic dependence on men is the root cause of their disadvantaged status, the gender composition of