



Bellagio Conference 2011 Abstracts: Arab Families and Youth in Contemporary Crisis

Palestinian Youth in East Jerusalem: construction and reconstruction of identity, desire, and life-styles

Eileen Kuttab

Focusing on Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem ages 18-25, this chapter explores their changing circumstances based on the unique reality of living in a Palestinian city aspired to be the capital of the future Palestinian state, while at the same time considered to be the united and eternal capital of the Israeli state. From a class and gender perspective, the research explores the veritable schizophrenic nature of youth experience in dual cultures and how the present reality may impact their futures in a profound way. Although the young people interviewed maintain their Palestinian identity on one level, as economic conditions shift radically, youth devise new forms of conduct and self-representation to fit in and cope with dual cultures and the forces of tradition and modernity.

Marriage in Crisis Conditions: Discourses of Partnership, Power and Propriety

***Penny Johnson and Lamis Abu Nahleh, conducting this project jointly in Palestine.
Annelies Moors is contributing a complementary chapter on forms of Islamic marriage
in the Netherlands.***

Building on their investigation of changes in marriage ceremonies and arrangements in the two Palestinian intifadas (published in JMEWS 5:3) and in the framework of an exploration of the politics of marriage, this chapter interrogates ways in which during sustained emergency conditions in Palestine, marriage and family life constitute both a

source of survival and mobility and a site where insecurities and tensions are enacted. Focus group discussions in Palestine with young women underscored perceptions that tales of “improper” marriages – particularly new forms of customary marriage and marriages between the old and young—are circulating as tales of moral danger and social illness. At the same time, new forms of Islamic marriage are the subject of contest. Also of particular interest are how Palestinian wives and husbands deploy discourses and practices of “partnership,” “respect,” “trust” and being “together” to produce and safeguard family life and welfare in troubled times. The identification of indigenous visions of proper and improper marriages hopefully will contribute to moving beyond overly simplistic assumptions in the literature.

Collecting Data, Constructing Desire: The Girl-Child as Problem-Space

Martina Rieker

By examining the constructions of modern families through the problem-space of the recent evolution of a research category called the ‘girl-child,’ this study raises questions regarding issues of girls’ education, women’s labour, gendered subjectivity, and the politics of commodification and desire. The chapter’s primary focus is on Egypt, with auxiliary material from Yemen and Morocco.

Continuity, Ruptures and the Transformative Potential of Diaspora Experience

Ibrahim Elnur

This chapter will examine the changing political terrain resulting from massive out-migration from Sudan and the limited but selective return migration. How are political elites reproduced; how are inter-intra generational transmissions of knowledge and traditions maintained or lost; and how are the interactive diaspora/local communities compensating for the loss of what Gramsci termed ‘the organic intellectual’? Given that these are well-networked communities, what are the patterns by which new notion of family, gender, identity take shape?

Emergence and consolidation in Egypt of concepts of youth

Omnia El Shakry

This chapter explores the emergence of the category of ‘youth’ as a category of social, psychological, and political experience, focusing on the period of neo-liberalism and the emergence of a so-called ‘crisis of youth’ in contemporary Egypt. It will look at how contemporary visual culture practices in Egyptian cinema and the visual arts contest dominant discourses regarding the socio-political apathy (or extremism) and consumerism of Arab youth. It will explore how a new generation of Egyptian artists can help scholars redefine debates on neo-liberalism and Arab youth.

The Civic Struggles of Urban Egyptian Youth

Barbara Lethem Ibrahim

In societies with stalled reform projects and high risk associated with political activism, youth negotiate novel pathways to public participation. Despite the dangers in Egypt associated with ‘harmless’ activities such as blogging or using social networking sites, youth are engaged in a creative and constant struggle to find meaningful expression for their desires for public participation. The chapter applies a ‘social exclusion’ lens to examine some of the novel ways that Egyptian young people are negotiating public participation, including youth-led social service, charismatic young religious leaders and their movements, internet-based activism, and cultural forms of expression through galleries, clubs, and cultural gathering places like bookstores and coffee houses. Forms of open, participatory civic culture are constructed by urban youth in the absence of functioning democratic institutions.

Images of the Mother in Arab Culture

Zeina Zaatari

The role of a mother is among the most unquestioned and highly acclaimed role that a woman can have. Egyptian melodramas of the 80s and 90s produced a representation of the ultra mother. Karima Mukthar, an Egyptian actress, became the poster for the quiet, dedicated, sacrificing, and overall good mother. Her image was reproduced in show after show and movie after movie. In addition, it was and continues to be displayed in commercials where the voice of the all-knowing, nurturing and caring mother is needed. Despite different representations of women’s role on and off the screen, this archetype of the mother continues. This research project looks at the characteristics of this role, and analyzes the multiple reasons for its persistence. It will address connections to national projects and their transformation over the past few decades.

Families and Domestic Labor in Times of Crisis

Ray Jureidini

This chapter covers the time period of recent conflict in Lebanon beginning with the Israeli invasion in July/August 2006 and subsequent internal crises that induced many thousands of migrant domestic workers to leave the country. How do Lebanese families and the local labour market manage these crises in terms of the employment of migrant domestic workers that they rely so heavily upon? How does this effect the functioning of the family, particularly when household help leaves (for various reasons) and what are the means by which they seek to replace them? Who performs the household chores under such circumstances, and how does this affect internal family relations and emotions? In-depth interviews with both employers and employees were conducted, as

well as NGOs, embassies and members of the Lebanese Ministerial Committee for the reform of contracts and management for migrant domestic workers.

Exploring the Migration of Young Lebanese Couples

Mona Khalaf

This project focuses on young Lebanese couples who have left home to live and work in the Gulf area. The extent of this migration spiked sharply following the summer war with Israel in 2006. How is this migration stream similar or different from the long traditions of migration in response to crisis in Lebanon? Through questionnaires and interviews, data is being collected to answer questions regarding the motivations to migrate as young couples, reasons behind the choice of country of destination, the expected duration of migration. Centrally, the study explores how migrants' expectations and experience may shape their future and that of children.

Moving Families: (Un)Making Families Among Transnational Lebanese in the United States and Canada

Suad Joseph

Among Lebanese transnational families, contrary to the scholarship, this chapter argues that transnationalism, rather than fracturing nuclearity in fact facilitates it, driven in part by women's desire for nuclearity. A sense of "nation" was amorphous at best among the families studied, and women identified with or longed for Lebanon as a nation less than men. These families occupied multiple national sites, with women at times the more physically and culturally mobile. The women of these families are more agential than the literature tends to point to. They are deeply committed to the idea of family, but the idea of family changes and shifts for them without compromising the sense of commitment to 'family' as an ideal form. The reticulation of kin networks beyond the idea of "family" (nuclear or extended) create multiple chains across multiple nation state boundaries, which continually move, reconnecting in different ways in different sites. Charting the geographies of these families and the ways in which connectedness figures or reconfigures their notion of family during and through the migration process, helps us map how they "become" "families" (meaning husbands/wives/children) in the American continental context.

Family, Politics and Feminism: Lebanon in Crisis

Nadine Naber

This chapter explores the implications for feminist critique and practice in Lebanon of dominant Lebanese discourses that mobilize political support through "the family". It focuses on the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the 2008 internal civil conflict between government supporters and members of Hizballah. The analysis disentangles

how these moments differentially foreclosed possibilities for public feminist critiques and practices in Lebanon. While these moments constrained feminist practice, they also engendered alternative conceptualizations of family. The chapter identifies efforts by several different forces to open up spaces for feminist critique and practice in the context of militarism and war in Lebanon.