GENDER AND POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST[1]

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When I studied for my MA in Middle East politics (1996-97), the topic of gender was very marginal, appearing in only one week of one module (Comparative Politics of the Middle East). My other core modules—International Relations of the Middle East, International Political Economy of the Middle East and Comparative Political Economy of the Middle East were 'gender-blind'—that is, there was no acknowledgement that gender shapes how we determine 'who gets what, when and how', to borrow Harold Lasswell's famous definition, let alone how men and women may be differently impacted by politics. I completed my MA in Middle East politics assuming that gender was marginal to the *study* of political and economic dynamics in the region—despite the fact that I identified as a feminist. The neglect of gender in the study of politics, including political economy and international relations, is not confined to courses on the Middle East but is witnessed in the teaching of most politics courses – in which the 'week on gender' comes towards the end of the module, if it comes at all. This reflects the general marginalization of feminist approaches and knowledge within the discipline of politics.

It is my friendship with a social anthropologist, who was researching the women's movement in Egypt for her PhD, that enabled me to see that studying gender and adopting feminist

[1] I acknowledge that the term 'Middle East' is a geopolitical invention of Western colonialism and imperialism and its meaning has shifted over time. I use it as a short-hand to refer primarily to Arabic-speaking countries, including those in North Africa, in addition to Iran, Turkey and Israel-Palestine.

approaches was valid in academic studies. This social anthropologist, Nadje Al-Ali, would later become my research collaborator and co-author in developing feminist approaches to Middle East politics, from the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq to the Arab uprisings. I have also been inspired by other feminist anthropologists, sociologists and historians, whose work has been critical in helping me to develop my gendered approach to politics in the Middle East as well as feminists working in the discipline of international relations, international political economy and critical geopolitics more broadly.

This chapter aims to map out the field of gender and politics, highlight some limitations, gaps and emerging research areas before focussing on my own approach to researching gender and politics. By gender, I do not mean 'women'—although, much research on gender in the Middle East focuses on women as a means of correcting the masculinist bias in much Middle East studies scholarship. For feminists, gender is a socially-constructed category that differentiates amongst human beings on the basis of biological sex. In many societies, including the contemporary Middle East, there has historically been a recognition of only two genders – male and female, which are usually defined in terms of one another. Some contemporary societies as well as past societies have recognized a 'third gender' and, more recently, there is a growing trend, particularly in Western countries, that rejects binary gender categories. Nonetheless, it largely remains the dominant 'matrix of intelligibility' through which we are recognized and recognize others (Butler 1999: 24)—albeit one that is historically and culturally specific, rather than universal. Gender not only refers to the experiences and identities of embodied individuals but also to relations of power: 'gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power' (Scott 1986: 1067). This refers to the way in which gender difference shapes the distribution of power and resources as

well as the way in which meanings and concepts are constructed through differentiation, which is signified through reference to gender difference and hierarchy. However, gender should not be viewed as a discreet category; rather, it is always articulated in and through race, class, sexuality and other significant axes of social difference.

Throughout the chapter, I aim to highlight the importance of epistemology, ontology and methodology in different approaches to the study of gender and politics. I begin by discussing the legacies of colonialism in the study of gender in the Middle East and how scholars have attempted to challenge and undo those legacies. I then go on to map out different approaches to studying gender and Middle East politics, considering some of the achievements, gaps and limitations in this regard. I end by discussing my own approach to researching gender and politics rooted in a feminist approach to knowledge production, teaching and activism.

The Gendered Legacies of Colonialism

Anyone setting out to study gender in the Middle East region must be aware of the ongoing legacies of colonialism in relation to knowledge production. Edward Said's seminal work on 'orientalism' (1978) identified patterns in Europeans' representation of the 'Orient' (or, what, today, we call the 'Middle East'): that is, the 'Orient' as fundamentally different from and inferior to Europe, through the deployment of a limited number of tropes—namely, the 'Orient' as an unchanging, homogeneous, 'barbaric' as well as 'exotic' place. European orientalists focused in particular on Islam as the key variable in understanding the behaviour of 'Orientals'. Although Edward Said did not pay attention to gender in his criticisms of orientalism, feminist scholars have highlighted the significance of gender within orientalism and colonial discourse (Abu-Lughod 2001), specifically that representations of gender and

sexuality have been constitutive of the cultural difference constructed within orientalist discourse and vice versa (Yegenoglu 1998), with women of the 'Orient' represented as exceptionally 'backward' and 'oppressed' as a result of their 'culture' and religion. Indeed, the 'oppression' of Muslim women was held up as a marker of the inferiority of the 'Orient'. As such, colonial authorities sought to 'improve' the position of the colonized woman as integral to the colonial project--what the postcolonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak has referred to as 'white men saving brown women from brown men' (1988).

For Edward Said and other critics of orientalism and colonial discourse, the problem is not merely that these represent distorted or reductive representations of Middle East societies and peoples but that this discourse is deployed to justify colonial violence and Western power over the 'Orient'. The assumptions underpinning colonial discourse have continued into the post-independence era and are linked to continuing Western domination of the Middle East as well as Muslim populations more broadly. Western desires to 'save' and 'liberate' Middle East women were deployed to justify the invasions and bombings of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 as well as other practices in the war on terror, such as surveillance of Muslim populations in the West (Abu-Lughod 2002; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009a; Hunt and Rygiel 2007). The ban on the face veil (niqab) by a number of European governments (Weaver 2018) constitutes a continuity of colonial attitudes towards Muslim women. Such gendered and racialized discourse constructs the West as morally superior against a morally-suspect, 'backward' and 'barbaric' non-Western Other. Within this binary construction of the world, democracy, women's rights and progress are coded as 'Western', whilst despotism, women's oppression and 'backwardness' or 'under-development' are coded as 'Middle Eastern'/Muslim.

Since the 1990s, feminist scholars working on/in the region have done excellent work to challenge orientalist approaches to studying women in the Middle East and, in particular, the reductive deployment of Islam as an explanation for women's situation. Leila Ahmed (1992), Nawal El Saadawi (1997) and the late Fatima Mernissi (1987) were amongst the first to argue that Islam is not inherently patriarchal but, rather, patriarchal interpretations of Islam have come to dominate the religion in the modern period. Judith Tucker demonstrates the flexible ways in which judges interpreted Islamic legal doctrines before their codification as part of modern state building (1998). Meanwhile a growing body of work examines women activists who frame their rights with reference to the Islamic tradition (Badran 1995, Gole 1996, Mir-Husseini 1999, Osanloo 2009, amongst others). In addition, scholars have explored the significance of state formation, regime consolidation, nationalist projects and political economy in shaping gender relations and women's rights (amongst others, Charrad 2001, Hasso 2011, Kandiyoti 1991, Hatem 1992, Moghadam 1993). Simultaneously, scholarship on gender in the Middle East has challenged (neo-)colonial assumptions of women's passivity through highlighting women's agency in the negotiation of gender norms, identities and relations in various contexts (amongst others, Abu-Lughod 1986, Badran 1995, Hoodfar 1997, Le Renard 2014, MacLeod 1993, Peteet 1991). However, as Lila Abu-Lughod argues, it is also necessary to avoid romanticization of women's agency and/or to project assumptions of feminist subjectivities onto women in the region (Abu-Lughod 1990, see also Mahmood 2006).

The historical legacies of colonialism in the study of gender in the Middle East and the need to consciously challenge orientalist epistemology has meant that feminist scholars have been at the forefront of decolonizing Middle East studies. However, not all scholarship on gender in the Middle East is feminist and, thus, decolonial. The 'traditional'/'modern' binary

continues to implicitly inform the categories and assumptions of some scholarship on the region, particularly in the discipline of political science. This is evident, for example, in the normative privileging of democracy, secularism, gender equality and progress, and its implicit positioning in opposition to authoritarianism, religion, gender oppression and 'tradition'--despite the fact that 'the distinction between such discursive categories is difficult to maintain' (Hasso 2004: 658). In particular, projects of secularization, democratization, development and state feminism have had mixed results for different groups of women (and men), not to mention that the meanings of these categories are contested. The edited volume by Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) illustrates the disciplining effects of modernization for women as well as the selective ways in which Middle East actors have adopted and repudiated elements of modernity. Nonetheless, these categories continue to 'enframe' (Mitchell 1988) political science scholarship on the Middle East in ways that reproduce Europe and its experiences as the primary referent and measuring stick against which to judge the Middle East and contribute to shaping the ongoing representation of the Middle East as 'backward', 'oppressive' and 'despotic' in Western media, popular culture and government discourse.

Mapping the Study of Politics and Gender in the Middle East

In the Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics, the editors outline four main themes within gender and politics research in general: 1) gendering the conventional units of political analysis – elections, parliaments, political parties, amongst others – by focusing on differences between men and women; 2) examining political activities outside the parameters of conventional political science; 3) examining how institutions and macro-processes shape gender; and, 4) studying gender in intersection with race, class, sexuality and other axes of social relations (Celis et al 2013: 9). In the following discussion, I use these four themes to

map scholarship on gender and politics in the Middle East. This research is largely about women but, for the most part, adopts a gendered approach – that is, it understands the category of 'woman' as socially-constructed rather than biologically-determined. In mapping different themes in the study of gender and politics in the Middle East, I consider differences in terms of epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches as well as discussing limitations and gaps in existing scholarship.

Gendering the conventional units of political analysis

This approach to studying gender and politics is framed by a conventional, Eurocentric political science ontology of formal political institutions and processes, namely, political parties, legislatures and voting. Often scholars undertaking such research seek to question the universality of men's experiences of politics and reveal the degree to which women's experiences differ as well as attempting to account for these differences. This is currently a relatively under-studied theme within gender and politics research in the Middle East – despite the fact that there are many women who have run in parliamentary and local elections and even reached government positions, let alone the large numbers of women who vote. Until now, the handful of studies under this research theme have overwhelmingly focused on *measuring* women's political participation and attitudes towards it, largely drawing on survey data (for example, Benstead 2016, Benstead and Lust 2015, Benstead, Lust and Jamal 2015, Bush and Jamal 2015, Dahour and Dahlerup 2013).

The study of women's political participation in the Middle East addresses the gender-blind nature of the overwhelming majority of Middle East political science and can contribute to identifying patterns and trends that may be helpful in formulating policies and strategies to

increase women's political participation, which remains a long-standing feminist concern. However, in this type of research gender is treated as a variable rather than as an analytical lens and, moreover, is addressed to debates pertaining to political science and fails to advance knowledge about how gender and politics are mutually constituted (Silverberg 1990). Simultaneously, the focus only on the formal political sphere risks to reproduce the gendered inequalities and Eurocentrism of the discipline. The construction of politics in relation to a sphere of formal political institutions is embedded within a gendered division of space between the public and private realms, in which the public sphere is deemed to be the realm of 'politics', whilst the private sphere is depoliticized (Landes 1998, Pateman 1988, Staeheli et al 2004). Many feminist scholars seek to dismantle these gendered boundary-drawing practices, which are deemed to be integral to the construction of gendered inequalities and hierarchies, highlighting that the 'personal is political'. By limiting itself to the categories of conventional political science, therefore, this approach to gender and politics reproduces the public/private division underpinning gender inequalities. Moreover, it generally treats all women as a homogeneous category, failing to distinguish between women on the basis of class, ethnicity and/or other social difference.

In addition to this, the implicit referent for much of this work are Western democracies (Anderson 2006). The use of opinion surveys of attitudes towards women's political participation, democracy and religion seeks to measure the ability of Muslims to embrace the ('Western, liberal-democratic') values deemed necessary for democracy. In other words, a binary between the West and the Middle East is established, similar to orientalist discourse, but on the basis of supposed cultural affinity with democracy, operationalized via attitudes towards gender. Within this body of research, it is assumed that women's political participation is positive and a marker of progress towards greater democratization. However,

this ignores the possibility that the choice of women not to participate in the formal political realm may be a pragmatic response to the corruption and authoritarianism of existing political systems in the Middle East. In other words, there is a need for gender and politics research to not only destabilize the masculinist-bias but also the Eurocentrism within the discipline of political science.

Examining political activities outside the parameters of conventional political science

This body of scholarship goes beyond conventional political science categories to include women's non-conventional political participation, particularly in women's movements and women's organizations, as well as other types of movements. With regards to the Middle East, much scholarship under this theme has been conducted by feminist scholars working in disciplines other than politics –namely, history, sociology and social anthropology and includes documenting women's movements in different countries and historical periods, from colonial rule until the present day (amongst others, Ali 2018, Al-Ali 2000, Al-Ali and Pratt 2016, Badran 1995, Baron 2005, Evrard 2015, Fleischmann 1999, Hasso 2005, Peteet 1991, Tadros 2016, Thompson 2000). This body of research has not only sought to write women's movements and activism into the history of Middle East countries but also to examine how women have sought to advance their rights, including the ways in which they have framed their rights demands and their modes of organizing.

An important debate has centered on the degree to which women's movements have been able to reconcile feminism and nationalism. On the one hand, the emergence of women's activism was closely intertwined with the emergence of anticolonial nationalist movements.

On the other hand, nationalist movements have often relegated women's rights demands as a secondary issue and have also often set limits on the types of rights demands that women may legitimately make. Drawing on personal memoirs, media archives, oral histories and in-depth interviews, feminist researchers have assembled a rich and nuanced picture of the history of women's movements in the region that often goes beyond a binary understanding of feminism and nationalism (in particular, see Al-Ali and Pratt 2011, Badran 1995 and Hasso 2005).

A similar, although much more heated, debate has emerged between those who question the possibility that women's rights and empowerment can be achieved through reference to Islam or within Islamist movements (for example, Kassem 2013, Mojab 2001, Moghissi 1999, Tadros 2011) and those who argue that women's rights and Islam are compatible (amongst others, Mir-Husseini 1999, Badran 2009, McLarney 2015, Osanloo 2009) as well as highlighting the possibilities for women's empowerment within Islamist movements (Abdel-Latif 2008, Biagini 2017, Deeb 2006, Yafout 2015). Attempting to go beyond binary understandings of religion/secularism, a growing number of scholars have also demonstrated the ways in which secular-oriented feminism and Islamism have influenced and borrowed from one another (for example, Hafez 2011, Jad 2005, Salime 2011). Another contribution to this body of scholarship is the study of women in movements that eschew feminism and notions of gender equality, most notably the late Saba Mahmood's seminal work on women in the Egyptian mosque movement (2005). In line with Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), Mahmoud cautioned against understanding women's agency only through the prism of resistance to gendered hierarchies and challenged the hegemony of liberal assumptions about human desire for autonomy against which movements such as the women's mosque movement have been judged in Western scholarship.

Another growing focus of research, sparked by the Arab uprisings of 2011 and women's visibility within them, is women's participation in protest movements (amongst others, Al-Ali and Pratt 2016, Allam 2017, El Said et al 2015, Khalil 2015, Hasso and Salime 2016). In relation to that, the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence has emerged as both a dangerous obstacle to women's involvement in protest movements as well as an important objective of women's mobilization (Langohr 2013, 2014; Skalli 2014, Tadros 2014). Indeed, in the context of political turmoil and conflict since 2011, the 'body', in particular the female body, has turned out to be a key site of political struggle between competing political forces as well as an existential struggle for women's right to bodily integrity in the public sphere, as documented by a number of feminist authors (Al-Ali 2014, Al-Ali and Pratt 2016, Hafez 2014, El Said et al 2015, Hasso and Salim 2016, amongst others).

Whilst the above body of research expands the notion of politics to include acts beyond formal political institutions, primarily in the sphere of what is generally called 'civil society', nonetheless, it has tended to focus on the activities of predominantly middle-class women. By contrast, the activities of working-class women and women living outside urban areas have been relatively ignored. Partly this can be explained by the difficulties facing researchers who seek to research more socially and economically marginalized populations, since such research necessitates longer periods of trust-building to gain access. Nonetheless, a handful of scholars have studied working-class, peasant and Bedouin women, highlighting women's informal networks and everyday activities, including their resourcefulness in mobilizing resources to support their families (amongst others, Singerman 1995, Hoodfar 1996, Ismail 2006) and resisting Israeli settler colonialism (Richter-Devroe 2016, Richter-Devroe 2018).

Another under-examined theme is working-class women's participation in workplace strikes and protests (notable exceptions are Abisaab 2010, Ababneh 2016, Duboc 2013).

Examining how institutions and macro-processes shape gender relations, norms and identities

Research conducted under this theme examines, inter alia, how states and state institutions, political economy, political transition processes, as well as war and conflict shape gender. There is a rich body of work under this theme, much of it conducted by sociologists, anthropologists and historians. It has served to underline the fluid nature of gender in the Middle East, demonstrating differences between countries and over time, thereby countering orientalist assumptions about Middle East women's eternal oppression. It has assessed the ways in which 'the post-independence trajectories of modern states and variations in the deployment of Islam in relation to different nationalisms, state ideologies and oppositional social movements' has shaped gender (Kandiyoti 1991: 2; see also, Ali 2018, Al-Ali 2000, 2007, Al-Rasheed 2013, Le Renard 2014, Moghadam 1993). Related to this, a body of work has highlighted the significance of the codification of family laws in state formation and state building (Charrad 2001, Hasso 2011, Joseph 1991). In addition, work on state feminism has drawn attention to its critical role in legitimizing and mobilizing support for modernizing regimes (Bier 2011, Joseph 1991, Meininghaus 2016).

Another body of work has examined the gendered consequences of social and political change, including revolutions and uprisings (Al-Ali 2012, 2014, El Said et al 2015, Hasso and Salime 2016, Khalil 2015, Moghadam 1993, Peteet 1991, amongst others), political liberalization (Brand 1998), economic liberalization (Doumato and Posusney 2003, Errazouki

2014, Hatem 1992), urbanization (Hammad 2016) and war, occupation and displacement (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009a, 2009b, Kassem 2011, Muhanna 2013, Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009, Sharoni 1995, Taraki 2006). This work has highlighted the differential ways in which women are impacted by social and political change as well as the specific ways in which projects to transform gender norms and relations (in either conservative or emancipatory directions) are central to transformation processes. Overall, this body of work not only highlights how the meanings and embodiments of gender shift over time but also how gender is always contingent and contextual.

Intersectionality and beyond

Despite a growing emphasis amongst feminist scholars on the importance of intersectionality in the study of gender in the Middle East, intersectional approaches are still not commonplace. As already noted above, there remains a tendency to either assume an undifferentiated category of 'woman' (as in the case of scholarship measuring women's political participation) or to focus on the activities of middle-class women. Partly this is due to the methodological challenges of intersectionality (for further discussion, see McCall 2005, Nash 2008).

Feminist scholars working on contexts in which ethnic and religious identities are particularly politicized have, by necessity, sought to understand how women's lives are shaped by ethnic/religious identity and difference. Of course, the challenge is to avoid essentializing identity and reproducing identity categories as fixed, but rather to understand the ways in which ethnic and religious identities are constructed in particular historical moments and geographical spaces and the mutually constitutive role of gender in identity formation

processes (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989, Yuval-Davis 1997). The racialized nature of Israel's settler colonial regime necessarily positions women differently on the basis of their ethnoreligious/national identity (Abdo 2011, Lavie 2014, Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2015). Research on Iraq where ethnosectarian identities have become politicized as a result of decades of persecution of Kurds and Shi'a as well as the creation of a political system based on ethno-sectarian after 2003 has particularly shaped the differential experiences of women as well as the different priorities and modes of their activism (Ali 2018, Al-Ali 2007, Al-Ali and Pratt 2009a). Scholars have most often adopted methods of collecting women's personal narratives and oral histories and/or ethnography to reveal the complexities of women's lived realities, identities and subjectivities and how these may have shifted over time, contributing to a destabilization of identity categories. However, there is still much more work to do mainstream intersectionality throughout Middle East gender studies.

A nascent body of gender scholarship on the Middle East shifts the ontological gaze away from women towards studying men as gendered beings (amongst others, Amar 2011, Elsadda 2012, Ghannam 2013, Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb 2000, Inhorn 2012, Jacob 2011). Alongside this, there is a growing body of work seeking to destabilize binary categories and examine non-normative gender and sexuality in the Middle East (Amar 2013, Merabet 2014, Najmabadi 2014, Whitaker 2006) as well as investigating sexuality as a key site of local and transnational political struggle (Amar 2013, Massad 2002, Pratt 2007). To some extent, the increasing interest in non-normative gender and sexuality is reflective of the growing visibility of activism seeking recognition and rights for sexual minorities, particularly in the wake of the Arab uprisings.

Distinguishing a field of study of 'gender and politics' in the Middle East

In this section, I will discuss how a gendered approach, or more specifically a feminist approach, can be deployed in the study of Middle East politics. As I have already discussed above, I have been influenced by and build on the work of gender scholars in disciplines other than politics. I share many of their ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches, such as: a focus on women's lives and agency and the political, social and economic factors shaping these; challenging orientalist assumptions and masculinist bias in the study of gender; destabilizing binary categories and fixed identities; the use of qualitative methods and interpretative methodologies. Moreover, in my work, I do not limit myself to the categories of conventional political science and seek to highlight the significance of women's activities beyond the sphere of formal political institutions. Therefore, a question remains, what is 'political' in my own research on gender and politics? And, given that many feminists view 'the personal' as 'political' and even 'international' (Enloe 1989), is it even possible to delineate a separate field of study called 'gender and politics'?

Despite the difficulties and even desirability of disentangling a separate sphere of study called 'gender and politics', I argue that due to the organization of academic institutions and their funding in most parts of the world it is not possible to completely abandon the study of 'gender and politics'. In the UK, most academics work in departments defined by discipline and the funding of academic research is also organized along disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, for professional reasons, I have had to engage with the discipline of politics, including its subfield, international relations. This means engaging with some of the major conceptual categories of the discipline as well as some of the main debates. However, given my avowedly feminist approach, I have sought to engage with the study of 'gender and politics' in the Middle East in ways that challenge hegemonic knowledge and deconstruct and

destabilize dominant categories. In this respect, I draw extensively on feminist theory more broadly, particularly from the field of feminist International Relations.

1) Keeping a focus on 'formal politics' without reproducing Eurocentric and masculinist bias of mainstream political science. This entails employing a 'gendered lens' (Peterson and Runyan 1993/2013: 20) through which to view the institutions, processes and dynamics that are commonly studied in politics and international relations. By applying a 'gendered lens' to politics, feminist scholars working in the field of international relations have demonstrated how international processes—such as, war, diplomacy and global trade--depend upon particular notions of gender and gendered relations (Enloe 1989; Peterson 2003, Tickner 1992): for example, the notion of militarized masculinity deployed to mobilize men for war or the role of women's unpaid domestic labour in reproducing the global economy. Simultaneously, it is essential that a 'gendered lens' is also sensitive to the particular histories of colonialism, imperialism and global capitalism, as well as the intersections of race, class and sexuality in shaping gender relations, identities and norms. For example, in this way, we can understand the apparent paradox of the Bush Administration's use of feminist language to justify the military invasion of Iraq as a continuity of 'white men saving brown women from brown men' (Spivak 1988: 92) as well as comprehending the rejection of gender equality by Iraqi political leaders as a rejection of such a logic and as performative of sovereignty in post-invasion Iraq (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009a). This leads us to the second approach to studying gender and politics.

2) Expanding the meaning of politics and the political to include the personal, the private sphere and the everyday. This involves viewing the 'personal', including gender identities, relations and norms, as well as sexuality, as a central site of political

struggle between different actors (regimes, political opposition groups, women's movements, foreign governments, international organizations, amongst others). For example, in post-invasion Iraq, newly-empowered political-religious parties sought to reformulate gender relations and norms, such as women's dress code and gender mixing in public, to symbolize a break from the period of Ba'th rule, associated with state feminism, as well as to impose their conservative gender ideology and consolidate their authority. An important focus of this were efforts to repeal the existing unified and relatively progressive personal status code, dating back to 1959, and its replacement with family law governed by respective religious sects, thereby opening the way for differences between Iraqi women with regards to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance in women's rights. Simultaneously, the devolving of family law to religious sects contributed to mobilizing the loyalty of communal leaders to the state, by trading communal autonomy for women's citizenship rights (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009a).

More recently, I have examined the centrality of gender to the political transitions following the 2011 uprisings. As in Iraq, different political actors in post-uprising countries sought to reformulate gender relations as a means of (re-)imposing their authority in addition to undermining revolutionary movements (El Said et al 2015). However, they were met with fierce resistance on the part of women activists, who have used a range of strategies to subvert and resignify gender norms in order to legitimize their involvement in the political sphere (Alnaas and Pratt 2015, Pratt 2018). As previously noted, one of the most crucial sites of political struggle have been women's bodies, as illustrated by the shocking use of sexual violence against women protesters to push women out of the political sphere.

Expanding the meaning of politics to incorporate the personal/private/everyday also leads ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically to a focus on women's lives and experiences as a means of understanding the ways in which 'global politics is felt and constituted by real living embodied beings' (Hansen 2015: 19). As Cynthia Enloe argues, 'Paying serious attention to women can expose how much power it takes to maintain the international political system in its present form' (1989: 3). Of course, it is also important not to essentialize or homogenize women and to pay attention to differences amongst women on the basis of class, nationality, place of residence, amongst other axes of social difference.

3) Reflecting on the politics of knowledge production and its role in perpetuating gendered and racialized hierarchies of power within the Middle East and between the Middle East and the West. Finally, I argue that a feminist approach to the study of gender and politics must consider and reflect upon the politics of knowledge production about the Middle East and its role in perpetuating power hierarchies within international politics. This approach to academic research builds on the arguments of Edward Said and his understanding of Western knowledge about the Middle East as integral to the ability of the West to dominate the Middle East (1978). Similarly, feminist theorists have emphasized that academic knowledge is not neutral or objective but rather is partial and situated, embedded within relations of power (Haraway 1988). In this respect, it is important to think about the theoretical and methodological approaches that we employ to study politics and international relations; the ways in which Middle East politics is taught and the next generation of researchers are trained; and the political economy of higher education, including research funding.

With regards to the study of political science and international relations, it is essential that we question the categories that shape our scholarship as well as the wider world. Commonly used categories and binaries that structure the field of politics and international relations, such as, 'political' and 'social', the 'public' and the 'private', the 'domestic' and the 'international', 'modern' and 'traditional', 'West' versus the 'Middle East' are intrinsically gendered and racialized (amongst others, Peterson 1992, Hyndman 2001, Youngs 2004). Many feminists seek to deconstruct these divisions, seeing these boundary-drawing practices as an exercise of power that reproduces gendered and racialized hierarchies and exclusions, rendering particular bodies vulnerable to physical and structural violence (Hyndman 2001). Reflecting on the political and social effects of our research and the categories we deploy in our scholarship is part of a feminist commitment to challenge injustice and dismantle oppression. This approach to research often means that many feminists are both academics and activists and see close links between these two areas (Al-Ali and Pratt 2006).

With regards to the teaching of Middle East Politics and the training of the next generation of researchers, it is important to think about the curriculum, which topics and which authors are included. To what degree are courses and modules on Middle East Politics and International Relations reproducing masculinist and Eurocentric bias within the field? How can we mainstream a gendered and decolonial approach throughout our teaching of Middle East politics? This does not mean that we completely remove any texts from our reading lists that do not incorporate a gendered and/or decolonial approach. Rather, I suggest, we bring gender-blind and Eurocentric texts on Middle East politics into conversation with feminist and decolonial texts, benefitting from scholarship on the Middle East that is undertaken in disciplines other

than politics and IR. In this way, we can 'provincialize' (Chakrabarty 2000) currently hegemonic approaches within Middle East politics and contribute to disrupting the reproduction of the masculinist and Eurocentric assumptions within knowledge production about the Middle East. Moreover, as the UK student-led campaign to 'liberate the curriculum' has argued, a more diverse curriculum also contributes to making universities more inclusive and challenging sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia and other exclusionary and discriminatory trends on university campuses. Finally, for me, the study of gender and politics in the Middle East also involves an awareness of and reflection on the ways in which the political economy of higher education and research funding shapes how we produce knowledge about the Middle East. Every country will have its own specific environment in this respect. In the past, the marginalization of gender scholarship contributed to the lack of funding for research on gender. However, the securitization of women's rights and empowerment within the 'war on terror' has meant that certain types of gender research—or research about women—have attracted more interest and funding. However, there is a huge challenge to avoid the cooption of gender research in the Middle East by agencies seeking to instrumentalize women's empowerment for militaristic and/or neoliberal goals (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009c).

Meanwhile, the increasing marketization of higher education is common to many countries, and includes the use of metrics to measure and rank the performance of individual academics and their institutions with regards to research, publishing and teaching quality, the introduction of student fees and a view of the student as 'consumer', the adoption of corporate management techniques from the private sector and the growing 'casualization' of academic staff, amongst other trends. However, it presents particular challenges in particular contexts. In the UK, the marketization of

higher education amplifies specific threats to academic freedom facing those who research and teach on Middle East politics. Those threats come from the government in the form of the Prevent Duty – anti-terror legislation that makes it a duty for all public bodies, including universities, to prevent individuals from becoming 'radicalized'. This legislation, with its vague terminology, has created a situation of uncertainty for institutions and individuals that encourage over-compliance and self-censorship. Other threats come from pro-Israeli groups who seek to curtail critical discussion of Israel on university campuses, using social media and legal threats to harass institutions and individuals who they deem to be 'too' critical of Israel (Al-Ali 2018). Those teaching Middle East politics are often amongst those academics who are vulnerable to such threats, given their subject expertise, whilst early career teachers and researchers are the most vulnerable, as any association with controversy created as a result of their teaching and research areas threatens to undermine their chances of achieving a permanent position. Whilst these threats are not particular to those researching and teaching gender and politics in the Middle East, nonetheless, they create a fertile climate for self-censorship and work against efforts to dismantle masculinist and Eurocentric bias in knowledge production. Hence, an important part of doing research on gender and politics in the Middle East is participating in collective efforts by trade unions and academic associations to resist threats to academic freedom and job security.

Implications for Data Collection and Analysis

One of the defining characteristics of feminist approaches to research is its methodological pluralism, which includes both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. Whilst my own research has been based largely on semi-structured interviews and

personal narratives, using interpretative and deconstructivist methods of analysis, there is no single method of data collection and analysis that is most appropriate for studying 'gender and politics' and it may be appropriate to even combine multiple types of data collection in a single research project. Choices about methods of data collection should be guided by epistemology and methodology, theoretical frameworks, research questions and objectives, as well as the degree of access to material resources to support research, ease of access to the field and research deadlines. For example, as briefly mentioned above, ethnographic research amongst marginalized communities may be very difficult in practice because it necessitates long periods in the field, which may be difficult to finance as well as to balance with family obligations. Moreover, it is important to be aware of and try to mitigate any power imbalances between researcher and research participants, in particular by not viewing the researcher as 'the expert' but, instead, valuing the knowledge of research participants as expert. In my own work, I have found that the interaction with research informants in the data collection process always forces me to rethink my research questions and even theoretical frameworks. Another important characteristic of feminist research is self-reflexivity about the researcher's positionality and how this may shape the research process, from the formulation of research questions to the experience of data collection itself. Finally, and most importantly, there are ethical issues to consider. For feminist researchers, this not only involves thinking about the safeguarding of research informants (although, of course, this is important, especially in contexts of political repression and conflict) but also about the possible uses of research results (Al-Ali and Pratt 2006). In my own research on gender and politics, I have sought to ensure that all stages of the research process, from the choice of topic to the choice of data collection and data analysis methods, are informed by feminist values.

Conclusion

This chapter began by discussing the specific legacies of colonialism in the study of gender in the Middle East and highlighting the achievements of gender scholars in challenging the orientalist assumptions of Western scholarship and discourse on the Middle East. In this way, there is a close relationship between efforts to decolonize Middle East studies scholarship and to dismantle masculinist bias within it. I then went on to map the diversity of research being done that is relevant to the study of gender and politics, much of it being conducted in disciplines other than politics science. It considered some of the gaps and limitations of this research, such as the Eurocentrism of some research, the disproportionate focus on middle-class women as well as highlighting emerging research areas on masculinity and non-normative sexualities. In the final section of the chapter, I addressed the question, what is political about my own approach to gender and politics research. I discussed how an avowedly feminist approach to the study of gender and politics seeks to break down the (gendered and racialized) binary categories that inform our research, teaching and professional lives. In this sense, a feminist approach to the study of gender and politics should aim to challenge, resist and dismantle the structures that perpetuate oppression and injustice within our scholarship, our workplaces and beyond.

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