

Power, Sexuality, Politics, and Gender in the Middle Eastern Resistance

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Abstract. In the Middle East, wars and conflicts had a significant effect on women and gender. This research essay aims to call attention to the current oppression and war in the Middle East affecting the responses of women in the Middle East. In particular, the cases I used in the context of Iraqi, Palestinian, and Kurdish women. The resistance of the Iraqi, Palestinian, and Kurdish women of Turkey, outside the 'Orientalist' rhetoric is discussed, which portrays Middle East women in armed wars as purely powerless and helpless victims. The nuanced reality of Arab cultures, particularly how women's experiences differ over time and place and the methods they employ to negotiate themselves, has not been helped by simplistic generalizations. As Michel Foucault says, there is power, there will be conflict, and because resistance is a focus point in this essay, I will define power, including the empowerment of women.

Keywords: Feminism; Masculinity; Femininity; Middle East; Politics; misogyny

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1. Introduction

For generations, the role of women in state-building and armed conflicts has been remaining highlighted in the Middle East, especially after the involvement of the UK and the US which showed the armed presence of women as female suicide bombers who kill themselves in the name of their region. Uprising revolts in Israel showed that women of Palestine participated in violent acts too to protect their interests and it assumed that Palestinian women stabbed Israeli soldiers to show their political strength (Burhan, Habib, Tariq, and Asghar. 2016).

Globally, the status of women is always lost due to polygamy and the misogynist attitude of men towards women. This essay is about the representation of women and their rights in the

Islamic world. It is a common perception that Islamic women are, marginalized and under oppression since the Islamic invasion but the scenario is quite different. As previously women were not even allowed to drive cars in Saudi Arabia but right now, they are allowed. Egyptian women can lawfully divorce their husbands legally after slight amendments. Women are enjoying their social and political rights in Tunisia as well where they can abort and polygamy is also considered illegal due to the social, political, and Islamic status given to women of the Middle East. Women served as Vice President in Iraq and also served as Ministers in many territories of Muslim nations like Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. Power dynamics in Muslim nations have thus been shifted from being ruled to being independent in

certain aspects of life by removing all the strongly embedded stereotypical notions of women subjectivity (Tariq, 2017).

According to Michael Foucault and Judith Butler, Queer theory is based upon the notion of everyone where sexual minorities, oppressive nations, constitutional identities, the subjectivity of any gender, and resistance to oppression occurs and is discussed worldwide. The dynamics of Gender and women in Islam are misinterpreted as the caretakers of the home, and family and should be bounded within four walls of the home. But the reality is different and women are allowed to do certain things within their boundaries. Western misinterpretation depicted a wrong image of Middle Eastern women as veiled and vulnerable having no right or liability to take decisions. Women in third-world countries are also participating in the same level of progress.

2. Pre-Imperialism and Middle East Since Past

British Imperialism dates back to 1798 in the Middle East when Napoleon invaded Egypt which affects British policies in the mid of 20th century and interplayed Great Power Rivalries to balance the political and economic structure of the nation. It has been divided into four interactions when Imperialism affects the Middle East:

- i. After the conquest of Egypt by Napoleon, political and economic stability occurred and was seen in the Middle East.

- ii. Official infringement occurred which leads to World War I after the invasion of Egypt.
- iii. After World War II period when in 1948 Israel emerged from the region of Palestine and the Israel-Arab Wars took place also started Palestinian refugee problems (Hariri, 2015).

2.1. Orientalism

Edward explains orientalism in his own words by saying that the Middle East is a Eurocentric term derived from British proximity. British and French are considered to be the invaders of the Middle East. It started in a sense when they set up their business ties and influenced their region and religion which is now even implemented in the 21st century. Orientalism is the belief based upon the concept of exaggeration for looking over the distorted differences between the people of Arab and British. They have biased beliefs about Arabs and call them exotic, backward, uncivilized, and sub-human people having no education or sense to accept Western influence or change (Ward, 2018).

2.2. People of Lot

The slogan is used in the Middle East for people who belong to homosexuality or trans-sexuality as they are misinterpreted by the teachings of the Quran. Middle East doesn't use words like gay or lesbian for those people rather they use certain words having no meaning in the dictionary. In the Middle East, Islam and misinterpretation of Islam are considered to be the logical and religious explanations for the arrest, exile, and detention of homosexuals. It is allowed in the United States and many other

Western nations but in the Middle East, people are still fighting for their same-sex love and then murdered thousands of people. Iraqi women portrayed their public and political interests related to equality took on International channels as well as along national-level lobbying or campaigns and they are making reports as well against state flared violence against women by proposing certain reports made in NGOs (Olney, 2017).

3. Middle Eastern Women - Oppression and Resistance: Uprising Revolts against Women

Limited visibility of literature on women in the Middle East has led many Western nations to make belief that women in Middle Eastern nations are always oppressed, vulnerable, inferior, excluded, marginalized, deteriorated, financially and emotionally dependent, and imprisoned by the dominant male members of society. After the critical analysis done by many scholars, it has been noted that poor status and marginal inferior level are given everywhere while it is depicted wrongly. Women in the Middle East since their invasion is fighting and stepping back against violence, state oppression, patriarchal norms, and misogynist social and political agendas. Here I'm going to reflect on the images of women during ongoing conflict and war situations in the Middle East related to Iraqi, Turkish Kurdish women, Palestinian, and Egyptians who are facing such deteriorated resistant approaches in the name of Islamic misinterpretations to subjugate them in all walks of life. The emergence and involvement of so-called Islamic States (IS) have led to a massive increase in enslavement and rape of many young

girls and also the life expectancy of women have been decreased to 66 from 85 due to violence, domestic violence, rape, mortality of mother while childbirth and many more. The role of Orientalist discourses and the reaction of Iraqi and Turkish women to state-regulated oppression in certain shapes have been enlisted here (Khodary, Salah, and Mohsen, 2020).

3.1. Turkey

In Turkey, Kurdish women are fighting against so-called formal state oppression of women by becoming part of certain non-peaceful activities of the armed forces. These women become active members of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (KWP) and they are actively showing their political strength by involving in many leadership roles like men.

Women have also made progressive claims under the umbrella of Secularization or Islamization where they became members of militant forces or peaceful non-armed forces to activate their rights. Historical Kurdish struggle showed clearly that women dismantled strongly embedded anti-feminist women participation in armed and resistant forces by defining its subjects under the umbrella of opposition to the patriarchal, colonialist, and capitalist order of male captivity over women (Holt and Jawad, 2013).

3.2. Iraq

In Iraq, Libya, and Syria, women have been affected negatively by many Civil wars and displacement activities resulting in so-called massive movements like the Arab Spring which reflects the involvement of women in certain

civil societies aiming for their rights. While Palestinian women rely upon non-conventional or peaceful resistance towards male oppression and dominance of men over women in certain areas of life. Iraqi women are still perceived as peace-makers within and outside the home that can compromise their wishes and desires to maintain peace in the family. Middle Eastern women are fighting their fight, unlike Western feminist movements where they are challenging the Orientalist point of view which says that women should be veiled and bound within the four walls of the home. The concept of “Everyday Resistance” was introduced by James Scott who conceptualizes certain strategies of resistance by women against their status. He said that we can use culture as a tool of resistance and ensure that women incorporate a positive role in the uplifting of cultural norms.

3.3. Arab Spring

It has shown the stereotypical image of women being shown in the Western agenda and said that women are fighting and even risking their sexual assault to restore democracy and demonstrate inhumane activities against women.

4. The Future of Women in the Middle East

It is a common perception that whether you belong to a traditional, modern, western, or eastern state if you're a woman you aren't supposed to enjoy the same liabilities as given to males and you're considered to be the most disadvantaged group of your society. The Global Gender Gap Index published a report on Gender gaps between different countries which showed that Turkey, Iraq, and Palestine are the nations still among those deprived and

marginalized portions of society where women are still fighting armed or peaceful fights with state or misogynist ideas to represent their identity and individuality.

Women are breaking the stereotypical boundaries in Gulf Countries and removing the cement ceiling. Iran, Turkey, and Palestinian nations. For example, if a researcher talks about Iran, it has a long history dating back to 1905 during the constitutional revolution when popular political and social parties demanded a quality check on the Monarchy of Qajar. From 1920 to 1979, the regime of Pahlavi made some influential progressives for women in the field of education, employment, and political participation along with the right to be enrolled in universities and the right to give vote for their favorite political party or leader. But still, their certain legal constraints which hinder women to become equal participants in any organization. Suppose a driver hits any woman pedestrian then the penalty amount to that victim will be paid half. And a married woman may not be allowed to travel internationally without the written permission of her husband. But since 2005, Iranian women have launched a campaign named “One Million Signatures Campaign” where young boys and girls are trying hard to remove discriminatory practices against specific gender.

5. Politics and Men is of no Significance for Women

Since the inception of international politics and international relations among males and women, Gender is ignored because certain theories were proposed by male-dominated Western scholars

who excluded the basic notion of gender in this mainstream. Many feminists have argued on this stance by saying that international politics and relations are masculine and thus gender-biased when we approach issues concerning women or deteriorated status given to males. Theorists were males thus they ignored the concept of another gender ignored the concept of gender itself. After World War I, scholars argued that it is time to get all genders in the mainstream to promote research and topics teaching on cooperation and involvement of both genders in the time of war and peace. Scholars have made explicit statements about the gender-based exclusion of women from politics and this issue was addressed by a few feminist scholars.

J. Ann Tickner argued that many theories are male-originated and male-centered and these theirs address that in the attainment of enlightenment, autonomy, and rationality, women are not capable enough or strong enough to take part in international relations and political paradigms as they are not emotionally stronger to take decisions on their own. Thus, these Western-based theorists ignore the overall concept of gender while drawing theories on the inclusion of the feminine or masculine nature of any gender. The basic misunderstanding between International Politics and Feminism is divided into three main sub-sections by Tickner:

- i. First, it is manifested that gender is a more personal issue rather than a public one. Thus, it should not be incorporated into international realms.
- ii. Secondly, there are different opinions and ontologies of feminist and non-feminist

people which aren't going to be incorporated into international political dynamics.

International politics is considered a male domain in ways that both genders have different emotional and physiological appearances and natures. Thus, politics is something that takes care of a nation's borders and it would be difficult for a female gender to take decisions boldly for the protection of its state. These questions were raised by J. Ann Tickner.

- i. Why can't I see a gender equality index in my discipline and why I'm seeing few women in global relations and politics?
- ii. If this field has been defined as a conventional subject, then why there are few writings and readings produced by women?
- iii. Why the absence and explicit removal of women have been so apprehensive in the world of diplomacy, peace-keeping, military foreign world politics?

6. Conclusions

Marginalization of women in fields like global politics is not going to be changed easily as it incorporated experiences of males only written and spoken by masculine voices. Tickner wanted to eliminate gender hierarchies and addressed how the world looks if they add experiences, knowledge, and stances of women in world politics and international affairs. But this is a male-centered approach held responsible for the coverage of male-dominated beliefs about the security and foreign concerns of the country. Politics and masculinity have

strong ties with each other by ignoring gender as a category and flaring up more gendered stereotypes which marginalized women over the edges. The problem is not with women's gender only rather the problem is with the exclusion of gender as an entity from world politics. These words and writings have been drawn by males where they addressed masculine concerns and never allowed women to attend any foreign policy meeting on the view that they will be focused on issues related to the Human Approach only instead of being focused on male-asserted problems.

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