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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

Debate: Oil, Islam, and Women

Debate: Does Oil Wealth Hurt Women?

Aili Tripp, Co-editor, Politics & Gender

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Michael Ross wrote an important and intriguing article entitled "Oil, Islam, and Women" (*American Political Science Review* 102, [February 2008]: 107–23), challenging a commonly held view that Islamic traditions have held women back. His article served as a response to Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, who have argued that a "clash of civilizations" between the West and the Islamic world was partly a result of the treatment of Muslim women and that gender inequality was a key reason for the failure of the Middle East to democratize. Ross claims that oil production, not Islam, is mostly to blame for the fact that so many Middle Eastern countries (and other oil, natural gas, and mineral producers) seem to lag behind when it comes to women's rights and status.

Ross's article has been widely cited in the popular media (e.g., *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *Toronto Star*, *Voice of America*) and in online blogs like *Salon*. It won the 2009 Heinz Eulau Prize for best article in the APSR. Some scholars of politics and gender found the article thought provoking, but others were also dismayed that such an important study did not sufficiently incorporate insights from the existing comparative politics of gender scholarship into its theoretical analysis.

Employing a multimethod approach, Ross examines oil production and employment data for 169 countries between 1960 and 2002 and goes into depth to compare Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. He argues that oil reduces the number of women in the workforce, which impacts fertility rates, educational levels of females, and, ultimately, women's political representation and participation. Oil thus reinforces patriarchal norms and strengthens Islamic fundamentalism. The argument also challenges a popular belief that economic growth has implications for gender equality to suggest that different types of growth have varied outcomes for women. Growth that fosters

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employment results in greater gender equality, whereas growth based on oil production and mineral extraction does not have the same outcome for women.

In this Critical Perspectives collection of essays, we have assembled a variety of reactions to Ross's study in the hopes that it will further debate and scholarship regarding the critical issues he raises. The contributors to these essays include a scholar of gender and politics in the Middle East who focuses on the strong patriarchal kinship–based networks that predated the discovery of oil (Mounira Charrad), a scholar of public opinion and political culture (Pippa Norris), a scholar of gender, politics, and Islam who examines the impact of legislative gender quotas (Alice Kang), and a scholar who looks at Ross's essay from the perspective of a political economy of gender (Teri Caraway). Michael Ross, then, responds in a final essay to this lively discussion of his work.

Kinship, Islam, or Oil: Culprits of Gender Inequality?

Mounira M. Charrad, University of Texas at Austin

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Gender inequality in the Muslim world has become the object of high drama on the international scene. Ghostlike images of women wrapped in burqas and begging in the streets of Afghan cities swept television screens in the United States following 9/11. The number of articles on Muslim women in English newspapers has increased exponentially in the last few years. Although the popular press and the media continue to emphasize seclusion and subordination in their description of Muslim women, scholars have written extensively and persuasively to debunk the myth of the Muslim woman as a victim, passively suffering the subordination imposed on her. Starting in the 1970s and continuing to the present, a rich literature has argued that as elsewhere in the world, Muslim women have not only resisted subordination but have actively shaped their own destiny (e.g., work by Leila Ahmed [1992], Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt [2008, 2009], Elizabeth Fernea [1998], Nikki Keddie [2002, 2007, 2008], and Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji [forthcoming]).

The lower participation of women in the paid labor force in the Muslim Middle East relative to other world regions (World Bank 2004, 2005) raises

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