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Fida J. Adely

EDUCATING WOMEN FOR DEVELOPMENT: THE *ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005* AND THE PROBLEM WITH WOMEN'S CHOICES[1]

The basic purpose of development is to enlarge people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and can change over time. People often value achievements that do not show up at all, or not immediately, in income or growth figures. . . . The objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives.[2]

In the 1980s, after a decades-long emphasis on economic growth as the primary engine for development, a number of prominent economists and development practitioners heralded a new era in the conceptualization of development as primarily a human endeavor with improved life chances and quality of life as the proper end. Thus was coined the term "human development," followed by subsequent efforts to delineate the essential dimensions of human development and the appropriate measures of a development endeavor that no longer had "growth" (and, more narrowly, increased income) as its primary indicator but now sought to measure human ends, capabilities, and opportunities. Of most prominence, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took up this charge in the form of an annual global human development report, releasing the first one in 1990.[3] Perhaps no other human development reports have received as much attention in the past few years as have the Arab human development reports.

This article provides critique and analysis of the *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Arab Women (AHDR 2005)*. That the *AHDR 2005* should be devoted to the issue of women comes as no surprise given the centrality of women and gender as a category in development discourse today and the international scrutiny that has been directed toward Arab and Muslim women by the West. In some respects, the report is unique in its treatment of women and development for reasons I will discuss. However, in most respects the report reproduces a dominant frame of analysis and a liberal-modernist discourse in its treatment of women in the Arab world, pointing to contradictions embedded in the human development framework and the underlying limits of this purported discursive shift.

The expansion of people's "choices" is critical to the development framework of the UNDP human development reports. I argue that there is a tension, evidenced in the *AHDR 2005*, between the claim that providing education is an essential element

Fida J. Adely is Assistant Professor in Arab Studies at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.; e-mail: fja25@georgetown.edu

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of expanding choices and the assumptions embedded in discussions about women and education regarding which choices are acceptable and/or desirable. These tensions point to the persistence of values derived from the mandates of global capital, albeit in the new language of neoliberal choice, revealing that human development in reality does not present a significant departure from earlier conceptualizations of development.[4] I draw on my ethnographic research to interrogate such assumptions and to shed light on the ambiguities built into the educational project, at least for some young women in Jordan today.

CAPABILITIES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

At its core, the human development discourse emphasizes expanding people's choices through the development of human capabilities. For Amartya Sen, capabilities are essentially the ability of people to live the way they want to live. Thus, the freedom to develop is not narrowly about the legislation of rights or the provision of resources but is rather about the freedom and ability to make choices among a multitude of desirable and achievable alternatives. According to Sen, "Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or less formally put the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)."[5] Furthermore, he argues that the "persistently deprived" or historically oppressed and excluded have over time come to limit their own field of choices or conceptualization of what is feasible.[6] Thus, he argues, human development is meant to expand the field of available choices—not just materially but mentally:

> It is thus important . . . to favor the creation of conditions in which people have real opportunities of judging the kind of lives they would like to lead. Social and economic factors such as basic education, elementary health care, and secure employment are important not only on their own, but also for the role they can play in giving people the opportunity to approach the world with courage and freedom . . .[7]

This qualification is particularly relevant in considering the ways in which the capabilities approach has been employed as a conceptual framework for understanding women's persistent inequality. The theoretical work on this conjecture is most closely aligned with the research and writing of Martha Nussbaum, whose book *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* lays out her arguments about the necessity of a human capabilities perspective to overcome the persistent deprivation of women around the globe.[8] Nussbaum, like Sen, emphasizes the important distinction between a utilitarian framework for understanding development and people's preferences and a capabilities framework that seeks to provide the capabilities necessary for the traditionally excluded to envision alternate choices. In addition, Nussbaum argues that to be effective a set of universal and central capabilities must be delineated:

> We can only have an adequate theory of gender justice . . . if we are willing to make claims about fundamental entitlements that are to some extent independent of the preferences that people happen to have, preferences shaped, often, by unjust background conditions.[9]

Thus Nussbaum endeavors to provide a list of fundamental human capabilities that represent the "bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires."[10] However, as

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Nussbaum makes explicit, these necessary capabilities can be independent of individual preferences.

Such a conceptualization of development, with human capabilities and choice as its central elements, provides an important backdrop for a critical reading of the *AHDR 2005* and other documents that take the capabilities approach as their starting point. Despite the core assertion about the expansion of choices through the provision of capabilities, the conceptualization of choice is ambiguous and misleading, most significantly because the emphasis on individual capabilities and "choices" glosses over the larger structural barriers and power dynamics that constrain actual opportunities.[11]

The problematic nature of this conceptualization of development as the expansion of choices appears most clearly in discussions about women's education in the Arab world. Underlying the belief in the power of educating women is an assumption about the proper forms that development should take and the assumed preferences women will have if only given the proper capabilities. These preferences are consistently linked to male-dominated fields of study and waged labor. Arab-women's choices have not always fit the patterns and correlations that development researchers have come to assume and assert in their educational policies and programs. In the *AHDR 2005* as well as in the broader literature on this topic, one typically finds "Arab women's"[12] choices cast as a problem of culture, religion, and family.

EDUCATION FOR WHAT? THE ASSUMED BENEFITS OF EDUCATION

In a human capabilities perspective, education, particularly formal schooling, is a key capability; denial of education is a major deprivation. A plethora of research points to the particular benefits that come from educating women. At the most basic level, studies have demonstrated a correlation between increased levels of education and decreased child mortality, decreased fertility, and increased life expectancy.[13] Even when statisticians control for factors such as income and geography, the relationship between increases in girls' education and improved health outcomes persists although the relationship to lowered fertility rates is less consistent.[14] Furthermore, the increase in the number of years of education for women has been shown to lead to increased earned-income potential.[15]

It has been more difficult to establish how education leads to such outcomes. What are the actual characteristics of schooling or education that contribute to such benefits? Answers typically fall into three categories. First, some research relates these outcomes to the characteristics of the girls. For example, girls who go to school tend to be healthier, less likely to suffer from malnutrition, and thus more likely to have healthy pregnancies and give birth to healthier babies.[16] Second, some researchers link improved outcomes to the curriculum, which presumably provides information that helps young women make more informed health decisions.[17] Related to this second category are arguments about the ability of educated women to "process" new information, the assumption being that formal schooling makes them more adept at handling such information.[18] Third, some studies argue that education increases the confidence of young women and/or empowers them to control decisions related to their fertility and health and that of their children.[19] In other words, girls who attend school will develop more confidence and, as a result, be more likely to assert themselves with male partners or to seek out medical care and be

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more assertive in their interactions with health-care providers. Beyond health benefits, it is typically assumed that educated women are more likely to pursue waged labor and that waged labor in and of itself is empowering for women, primarily because of the financial independence it is believed to grant. Such research forms the dominant frame within which the relationship between female educational attainment and development is understood, although this framing also faces criticism.

In many respects the Arab world has proved an anomaly. Women in the Arab world do not always follow the predictable patterns that have come to be viewed as a natural outcome of educating women. In 2004, the World Bank published its own report about women in the region, *Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere*. From the bank's perspective, the major "gender paradox"[20] in the region is found in the high rates of educational attainment alongside low rates of economic participation:

> MENA's rate of female labor-force participation is significantly lower than rates in the rest of the world, and it is lower than would be expected when considering the region's fertility rates, its educational levels, and the age structure of the female population . . . The effects and costs of this gender paradox are felt throughout society in many ways. Gender inequality holds back a country's economic performance.[21]

The paradox is even more profound for particular Arab countries. Jordan, for example, where females have full access to primary education and high rates of access to secondary and tertiary education, does not fit the dominant model in two respects. Despite high levels of schooling for girls, Jordan continues to maintain a comparatively high fertility rate as well as significantly low rates of labor-force participation.[22]

Understanding the terms through which the larger field of gender, education, and development is framed—and how the trends in the Arab world, which contravene this framework, are subsequently interpreted—is critical for understanding how the *AHDR 2005* represents educational attainment and represents women's development as a function of this attainment. Despite efforts to put forth a unique representation of development issues and challenges in the Arab world, the report constructs the same middle-class, liberal ideal of modern women who, given the proper education, can shape their fertility options, economic standing, and opportunities for political participation.

THE "RISE OF ARAB WOMEN" AND EDUCATION: PERSISTENT EXCLUSION?

The Arab human development reports are in many respects groundbreaking. Unlike many reports in this genre, they stand out both in terms of the scope of the issues they address and the lengths to which the authors have gone to provide some context for what are often depicted as universal development problems. For example, the authors of the *AHDR 2005* refer to the invasion and occupation of Iraq and the U.S.-led war on terror and assess their significance for thinking about women's human development. This approach to a regional development report is so out of the ordinary and controversial, in fact, that the head of the UNDP, in his foreword, takes pains to distance himself from the report.[23] Furthermore, the authors draw upon papers commissioned from authors throughout the region, intellectuals and activists involved in a complex process of collaboration.

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Although in these respects the report's approach is unique, the underlying assumptions regarding what constitutes development or improved quality of life are not significantly different. The report's assessment of the status of women in the region and proper outcomes of successful development are largely shaped by a liberal, modernist discourse that undergirds mainstream conceptualizations of development. Asef Bayat, in his analysis of the first three AHDRs, points to this fundamental contradiction:

> At times, radical tones are merged into neo-liberal imagery on economy, polity, elites, and change. A reviewer is bewildered as to how to interpret the text—as a treatise on political transformation or a conventional U.N. report with its "executive summary" and countless sections and subsections . . ."[24]

In the *AHDR 2005*, this reversion to "conventional" development categories and assumptions is particularly clear in the section on education and the subsequent discussion about women's economic participation. Here it is assumed that given the right capabilities—the right education—women will make predictable and universally desirable choices about fields of study, work, and family.[25] These "choices" are shaped by assumptions about the desirability of waged labor for economic development and as a necessary foundation for female empowerment. The failure of women to thrive in this respect is explained largely in cultural terms, and little attention is given to differing desires and constraints faced by women differently situated within the broad spans of the Arab world. Thus, although the report provides some historical and political contexts for discussing women's developments, this reversion to homogenized stereotypes of "Arab culture," "Arab families," and "Arab women and men" limits the ability of the report to transcend the universalizing tendencies of such reports.

Assumptions about the appropriate "choices" a developed and educated citizen should make enable the authors of the *AHDR 2005* to paint women's educational gains in the Arab world in a negative light despite much evidence to the contrary. Mass public schooling is relatively new to the Arab world. Like many parts of the developing world, the mass expansion of public schooling began in earnest only in the 1950s or 1960s and in some states even later.[26] In a relatively short period of time, however, most Arab states have been successful in providing access to formal education for boys and girls. Despite acknowledgement in the *AHDR 2005* that the Arab world has made tremendous gains in providing access to formal education for girls, the overall picture presented is bleak. The report is punctuated by statements about the "denial" and "deprivation" of girls and women from this capability that is so critical for their development. Any positive reflections on the status of "knowledge acquisition" among females are framed by a much more critical perspective (usually in the introduction to discussion and again in the conclusion). The following statement is typical:

> Despite the tremendous spread of girls' education in Arab countries in the last five decades, Arab women remain poorly prepared to participate effectively and fruitfully in public life by acquiring knowledge through education. This is most clearly manifested in the extent to which girls and women are still deprived of education and knowledge, especially those forms of knowledge that bring high social returns.[27]

A careful look at the data presented in the report reveals a much more nuanced picture and points to several problems with the way in which female education and the data

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on education are framed. Some of the gaps in the discussion of education are related to the ambiguity of certain statements, such as that the Arab region "displays one of the lowest rates of enrollment at various levels of education."[28] One is left wondering, lowest compared to what, enrollment in what institutions, and what constitutes education in this context.[29] Such ambiguity is not unusual for this genre of reports but can be decidedly misleading.[30] Furthermore, throughout the report, the depiction of the status of female education is enabled in large part by regional averages that mask substantial regional and class differences. Finally, in the *AHDR 2005*, the most serious critiques related to education are reserved not for the obstacles in knowledge acquisition (because the large majority of females in the region are in school) but for the types of knowledge young women acquire and, of most importance, for the uses to which such knowledge are put. The last sentence of the passage cited previously is indicative of this sentiment: the report's authors lament that girls and women are deprived of "forms of knowledge that bring high social returns." I will revisit the question of what these returns are envisaged to be. First, however, a closer look at the data and the status of girls' and women's access to schooling is relevant.

The *AHDR 2005* paints a depressing picture of female education in the Arab world. According to the report, "The relatively higher deprivation of girls in terms of educational opportunities at all levels extends across *all* [my emphasis] Arab countries . . . ." This statement is clearly belied by the data: at all levels of formal education in many, and at times a majority of, Arab countries (depending on what level of education is under consideration) girls are enrolled in equal or greater numbers than boys.[31] How then can the situation be depicted as such? One key explanation is the use of regional averages that gloss over major differences within the region. Two to four countries consistently bring down the averages. Although acknowledged in the report, this reality is overshadowed by sweeping statements about girls' educational deprivation.

The *AHDR 2005* presents data on primary-school enrollment for nineteen countries. Of these, nine have an equal number of boys and girls enrolled and in some instance more girls than boys.[32] In another six countries, the gap between boys and girls in primary enrollment is less than ten percent. The countries with the lowest rates of primary-school enrollment are significantly lower than the other Arab states. The enrollment rate in Comoros, Sudan, and Djibouti is less than fifty percent for girls. However, in these countries the enrollment rates are alarmingly low for boys as well.

Some understanding of context in these "outlier" countries is critical for understanding regional disparities. Djibouti, for example, is one of the poorest countries in the region; according to the UNDP, it ranked at the bottom of all Arab countries in 2002 for human development.[33] Djibouti faced considerable political unrest and a period of civil war in the 1990s.[34] According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 39 percent of girls and 49 percent of boys were enrolled (gross enrollment) in primary school in 2006.[35] This gender gap hardly seems the central issue given such low numbers. Within Djibouti one also finds major internal differences, with a nomadic population that has more limited access to formal education. For example, the gross primary-school enrollment for children of nomads is estimated to be as low as 11 percent.[36] In a similar vein, in both Comoros and Sudan, poverty, war, and instability underlie obstacles to educational access for females as well as males.

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The discussion in the report of girls' secondary-school enrollment begins by highlighting that "fewer than eighty percent of girls attend secondary school in all Arab countries except for four: Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine and Qatar."[37] The decision to frame secondary-school enrollments for girls in this manner is highly problematic when one examines the full picture. In nine of the sixteen countries for which data are given, there are more girls than boys enrolled in secondary school. In an additional three countries, the gap between boys and girls is less than 10 percent. Thus, the educational-access issue at the secondary level is not strictly, or even most of the time, about girls being denied an education that is available to boys. Boys are just as likely to be out of secondary school in a majority of the countries profiled.

The most significant gaps between male and female enrollment are found in Yemen, Djibouti, and Mauritania. Once again, boys' enrollment rates are also troublingly low, although the gap between girls and boys in Yemen is very large, with less than half as many girls in secondary school as boys.[38] Much of this gap can be explained by rural/urban disparities and poverty; Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world. This is in turn compounded by the lack of female teachers in rural areas and the persistence of early marriage. However, the situation in Yemen is quite distinct from that of other countries in the region.

One point that is never made but can be extrapolated from the data is that the countries with the most serious educational exclusions for girls face similar challenges in enrolling boys in school. This silence is perhaps no surprise given the report's focus on women. However, the failure to contextualize girls' low secondary-school enrollments in Mauritania, for example— where girls' secondary-school enrollment increased by 3 percent between 1999 and 2005 and boys' enrollment decreased by 1 percent[39] —gives a misleading picture of the major educational development challenges in this country. Recent research on girls' educational access points to the importance of other factors beyond gender that help explain the persistent exclusion of some girls from school. These include their status as members of marginalized subgroups in their societies, whether they live in urban or rural areas, and the socioeconomic status of their families.[40] In some contexts (e.g., Egypt), urban or rural differentials in school enrollment are much more significant than male or female ones.[41] Nonetheless, in development literature, challenges to educational access are still typically framed in terms of gender.

Yet, the trouble with the way in which female education is represented goes beyond the presentation of enrollment data. The discussion of higher education in the report is particularly revealing of underlying assumptions about the benefits and proper deployment of education capabilities. Of the seventeen countries profiled in this section, girls outnumber boys in eleven countries.[42] Given the strength of these numbers, the authors say little about the lack of access to higher education. By their own account, gender parity has been achieved in twelve countries. However, the overarching message is still a negative one—young women's inability to thrive. According to the report, the problem with higher education for females lies in the fields that women choose to pursue, or, to be more precise, that social and cultural constraints pressure them to pursue. As such, the analysis of higher-education data focuses on how women are disempowered by choosing to pursue study in the humanities and social sciences. Although the authors acknowledge that more women are entering the sciences, this shift is still viewed as insufficient because young women are not choosing the "right" sciences. For example,

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the report states that young women tend to prefer chemical engineering over electrical engineering or pediatrics over surgery.[43]

When such conclusions are placed into a more global frame of reference, one finds female science enrollment in a number of Arab countries to be significantly better than in the United States. For example, the report provides data on enrollment in engineering programs in nine Arab countries. In six of these nine countries (Bahrain, Djibouti, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine) over 20 percent of engineering students are female.[44] By way of comparison, in 2000, female enrollment in engineering was at a high of 20 percent in the United States. In 2005, only seventeen percent of undergraduates enrolled in engineering in the United States were female.[45] Furthermore, in the United States many more women graduate with degrees in chemical engineering than electrical engineering (in 2005, 35% compared to 14%)[46]; according to the *AHDR 2005*, this is evidence of persistent gender bias. If one accepts a standard of educational progress for women that accords greater value to male-dominated fields, many women in the Arab world are actually doing better than women in the United States.[47]

A number of concerns are raised through a critical look at the section on higher education. First is the contradiction posed by asserting that the acquisition of knowledge expands women's choices alongside the explicit statements that women should enter certain fields and that they should use their education for work outside the home, preferably in male-dominated fields. It is interesting, however, that the authors assert that it is local culture, the family, and men who undervalue women's contributions to society.[48] Yet it seems clear that the economic mandates of development and Western-dominated financial institutions are culpable for devaluing noneconomic contributions and economic contributions that do not fit into preferred categories of wage-earning labor.[49]

Women's labor and economic contributions are discounted in development discourse on two fronts. First, no value is credited to the important labor undertaken in the home for maintaining a household, raising children, and, especially among lower-income households, struggling to ensure economic survival through careful household management and manual labor.[50] Second, women's participation in informal income-generating activities, in family businesses, and in the agricultural sector is rarely captured in development statistics and in many instances explicitly devalued.[51] The *AHDR 2005* reinforces this tendency by explicitly devaluing women's decisions to enter "traditional" fields, with the only explicit characteristic given for a desirable field of study being the dominance of men in the field, or fields determined to be those with "higher returns."

The authors attribute female choice of educational fields to social pressures and to females' own beliefs, which are shaped by a patriarchal society, about what is possible and even desirable. They point to female preferences for jobs "that do not contravene the traditional view of their reproductive role or the division of work in the house and the raising of a family."[52] The report emphasizes that social beliefs about the proper place of women limit female educational and career aspirations. They do cite one example of an explicit university policy in Kuwait that has higher entry requirements for females,[53] but beyond this example the barriers they note are cultural, social, and most immediately familial. The concluding message in the education section of the *AHDR 2005* is that girls are struggling and achieving, and in many cases outperforming boys, in spite of their "culture" and families: "It is important to emphasise that girls achieve their academic successes in spite of obstructive social and family environments, which

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envelop many of them in the fallacy that a woman's destiny is the home while learning and careers are basically the domain of men."[54]

What is perhaps most troubling about explaining female choices in this manner is the failure to acknowledge that females might be acting on their own preferences—preferences that are often shaped by the desire to have a career that will enable them to spend more time with their future families and children. Readers are led to believe that women either have no real choice because they are being forced to pursue paths that are determined by rigid gender barriers or that they are suffering from a form of false consciousness that prevents them from even imagining alternative pathways. This analysis oversimplifies the decision-making process and fails to account for the full range of factors that work to shape and influence decisions about field of study and future career and family trajectories. It also assumes that such decisions could be made by individuals independent of their families' counsel, financial situation, and previous experiences of family members, such as older siblings. Families and "male culture" are essentialized as the traditional realms of backwardness and patriarchal oppression that need to be combated through modern education.[55] Women are seen as separate from these entities—as individuals who, if only given the capabilities, will make choices different from those their families' desire for them. [56]

It is obvious that patriarchal notions of a proper division of labor do exist and are at play in framing people's choices and desires—both men and women—but that does not preclude other explanations or an attempt at a more complex analysis of factors in such important economic, political, and personal decisions. The analysis in the report and in similar reports assumes that if women are given "real" freedom to choose, they will prefer waged labor outside the home. Were they free to develop their intellect and desires, they would realize that their labor outside the home would liberate them and empower them in the face of oppressive families and social structures. In this perspective, working outside the home is always a sign of progress, never an indication of need or deprivation.[57] Such an analysis also excludes the possibility that a desire to balance work and home is legitimate, despite the fact that related challenges are regularly the subject of public debate and discussion among middle- and upper-class women in the United States.

One recent example is instructive for comparative purposes. In a *New York Times* opinion piece on 25 April 2007, Linda Hirshman warns that the recent trend of fewer women with young children entering the labor force in the United States is problematic both for the economic potential and productivity of the U.S. economy because of the lost wages for women who choose to reenter the labor force later.[58] Most interesting about this piece was the response that it elicited. Two days after its publication, nine letters were published in *The New York Times,* all of which criticized Hirshman's devaluing of some women's decisions to stay home with their children.[59] The letter writers (all women) questioned her assertion that "participation in public life allows women to use their talents and to powerfully affect society" but staying at home to raise children does not.[60] One writer argued that feminism should have taught "us" that "choice is key."[61] Yet this is not the kind of choice that development discourse affords Arab women, nor is it a debate that is given legitimacy in the "developing world" context. Rather, as it reads in the *AHDR 2005*, such a choice or debate is the product of oppression or false consciousness.

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My own interactions with women in Jordan in the course of conducting ethnographic research there revealed some of the ambiguities and conflicting pressures surrounding work outside the home. I conducted this research in 2001, 2002, and again in 2005 for a total of fifteen months.[62] Consider the experience of Nur,[63] a woman who had retired from a low-level civil-service position as a typist when I met her. In several conversations about the desirability of work outside the home and her own experiences as a working woman, she expressed conflicting sentiments. She was the mother of seven children and entered the workforce only when her oldest child entered university. Her spouse was a schoolteacher, and they could no longer make ends meet with the university-related expenses. So, in her perspective, she was forced to work.

In many respects, Nur felt frustrated and disempowered by these circumstances. She was no longer able to care for her children as she wanted. Until she came home, they were out in the streets playing. Furthermore, exhausted from the long hours of sitting at a typewriter, she found it challenging to be the great hostess she had prided herself on being when family and friends came to call. She also missed the time she used to have with the women in the neighborhood. At times she resented having to work; on other occasions, however, she conveyed that being able to make decisions about purchasing items without having to go to her husband gave her some independence.

Although Nur found that work isolated her from her social networks, many of the teachers with whom I spoke found that working outside the home gave them the opportunity to socialize with peers and colleagues. Asked if she would like to retire, Mariam, a science teacher, said no because "I would become too isolated if I stayed at home." For Mariam, who did not have her own family nearby, this was particularly significant. However, other teachers, especially those with young children, wished they did not have to work. The existence of extended family nearby to help in caring for children and home influenced women's perspectives on the desirability of working, an important reminder that family is not usually viewed as a burden or an obstacle but rather as a critical support system, particularly when state services are virtually absent.[64]

The assumptions that underlie development discourse about gender, education, and development lead to conclusions and assumptions that are too simple to capture the complexity of Nur's experiences. Conflicts can and do exist between economic pressures that force women to work and women's own perceptions of what is valuable and/or powerful. Given economic deterioration in the region and the effects of neoliberal economic policies on the most vulnerable citizens, many women do not have choices about waged labor. However, given the choice, not all want to work; they may find the existing jobs exploitive and disempowering rather than desirable.[65]

EDUCATION FOR SECURITY

In this section I draw on my ethnographic research at the al-Khatwa School for Girls in northern Jordan, as well as among the families of the adolescent girls I came to know in the schools to point to possibilities that the *AHDR 2005* makes it difficult for a reader to imagine. I do not use this particular city in Jordan and these particular families to speak for the whole region but rather to explore the diversity and complexity of circumstances that might shape the desires and dilemmas tied to getting an education and the range of expectations for a better life connected to such desires.

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Going to the university, working, or getting married are among the options for a high school girl looking ahead and trying to ascertain the significance of her education. The benefits of being in school seemed clear to the girls I came to know. They went to school to get out of the house and to be exposed to different people and ideas. The future was more ambiguous. Everyone seemed to agree with the oft-repeated phrase that "a diploma was a weapon in the hands of a girl." But a weapon for what? Would schooling help them attract a good marriage partner and be a better mother and wife? Would their diploma enable them to work? Would work ensure financial independence or security?

In her discussion about the desire for education in the Old Moshi region of Tanzania, Vavrus argues that it can be explained in part by the "search for security at a time when global capitalism heightens a sense of insecurity."[66] In many respects, the adolescent girls and families I came to know in Jordan thought very explicitly about education in terms of their long-term security in a time of great economic and sociocultural uncertainty. They most immediately saw their education as critical to securing a "good" marriage, typically a very classed notion. Much along the same lines of an American concept of "marrying up," girls or their families wanted an educated and professional man of financial means for a groom. In order to marry up, a girl needed to be educated. On one level, this was tied to the belief that an educated man needed an educated woman as a partner in life, to raise his children, and to care for his household.[67] However, some men saw educated and potentially employable brides as desirable given that increasing costs of living had made it difficult for all but the wealthiest families to manage on one salary.

Despite assumptions about the links between a diploma and a girl's future economic and marital security, many Jordanians remain ambivalent about women's work—what type of work is appropriate and whether working outside the home is even desirable. At the al-Khatwa School for Girls I often heard debates about the desirability and even permissibility of women's work.[68] The debates were not limited to the religious acceptability or moral propriety of women's working outside the home, however; they frequently dealt with women's desires, the practical difficulties of working outside the home given household responsibilities, and the limited job opportunities in their locale. A conversation with friends Anwar and Lena about their expectations for the future reveals some of this:

Anwar: In the ninth grade everybody wants to be a doctor or an engineer. In tenth grade it's less and eleventh grade even less. Then you get to *tawjihi* [twelfth grade], and you just want to get the grade. A lot don't get the grades. They just want to go to university; it becomes about the university. They see the university as some big deal because it's open and co-ed . . . Then she wants a groom. The potential groom . . . the first thing he asks is how much is her salary? He wants her to help them.

Adely: But you said when a woman gets married that she stops working.

Lena: Yes.

Adely: So what is the benefit from the salary in the end?

Anwar: A woman who is an engineer won't marry a laborer. People will typically come and request the hand of someone of the same class.

Adely: So a doctor should marry an educated woman?

Lena: Yes. So she will understand him.

Adely: So about the salary . . . I still don't understand. They want a woman with a salary, but they do not want her to work?

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Anwar: She will go and get a salary. Then she has a child and then they need child care; he needs to send them and bring them, and he needs to send his wife to work, and they need to send food to the child care. [He thinks] Let her stay at home and cook for the kids; it's better for her. It takes all of the salary [anyway].

Lena: Also, now there are a lot of women who work, and when they see the women who do not work living a life of luxury . . . they start thinking about retiring or quitting. My mother [a teacher] was like this. She used to see her friends. They did not work, but they were living . . . But my mother would come home worn out and tired. When she would see the women sitting at home, she would feel as if something were missing from her life.

Adely: Your mother would tell you this?

Lena: Yes, and she retired. She says it is nice to sit in the house.

In this conversation, Lena and Anwar allude to multiple considerations in the process of defining ambitions and strategizing about the future. Anwar reminds us how much of a girl's future is determined by her grades because getting the grade is critical in determining if and what a young woman will study beyond high school.[69] A structural constraint not given due attention in the *AHDR 2005* is that few females or males really have a choice about the field they will enter; rigid high school completion and/or university entrance exams throughout the region typically funnel students into certain fields depending on academic performance. Furthermore, tracking systems based on academic performance put higher-performing students on the track to math and the sciences early on in their academic careers. In my own research among female high school students in Jordan, grades were clearly a dominant factor in what the young imagined was possible.

Lena's mother was a schoolteacher. She was educated, married to a doctor, and had only one child; she ostensibly did not have to work. For many other women that choice does not exist.[70] Anwar's mother was a widow who took in children to supplement her income. Although Anwar's mother would not be counted in the official labor-force statistics, her work to supplement her dead husband's pension reminds us that crisis, as well as economic circumstances, often leaves women with little choice about supporting their families. Mothers who did not work or who were forced by poverty to work at a number of informal jobs were often vehement about wanting a daughter to go to the university because of the economic hardships they had faced. For some of the women with whom I spoke, the hope was that a daughter would work and be able to gain some financial independence. For others the assumption was that a degree would ensure that she could marry someone better off than her father and maybe not have to work. Some working mothers, tired from work and all the other responsibilities they had to bear, discouraged their daughters from studying to work. Still, they felt that going to the university was important for a daughter's status and future marriage potential. Some families found the coeducational setting of universities threatening to their efforts to maintain the respectability of their daughters and sisters. However, rarely were such reservations separate from other considerations—financial, academic (as in the academic abilities of different girls), or personal, such as divorce, family breakup, or dislocation. All of this is difficult to envision as one reads the *AHDR 2005*.

Most girls had high hopes for completing their education, but they struggled with the expectations that education created and the shifting realities of women's lives around them. Although schools provide spaces for girls to negotiate conflicting pressures in

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21st-century Jordan, they also complicate this process by creating new expectations and placing value on new forms of knowledge and newly constituted status positions. The deterioration of the economic situation in most of the region has closed many doors girls thought had been opened even as, ironically, their participation in the labor force is believed to make them more attractive marriage partners.[71] The young women with whom I spoke were cognizant of the restrictions that bound their options—economic, cultural, and personal—and struggled to negotiate the opportunities and limits they faced. The reflections of these young women on the parameters of the possible and the factors that one needed to weigh provide a frame wider than that present in the *AHDR 2005*.

CONCLUSION

The *AHDR 2005*, despite making important contributions to the conceptualization of development challenges in the Arab world, fails to account for the range of factors that shape decisions about education, waged labor, marriage, and family. It oversimplifies the significance of global economic and political forces tied to contemporary development projects like formal education, and, despite giving credence to the importance of developing human capabilities to make informed choices, it continues to rely on assumptions shaped by economic determinants and a liberal ideal of progress about what constitutes progress and quality of life. Thus, the reader is unable to imagine alternate outcomes or desires.

Not only does the report's analysis exclude important considerations, but also in the process "the Arab family"—a problematic generalization in its own right—is framed as an obstacle to women's development.[72] This makes it difficult to envision the families, such as those I came to know in the course of my research in Jordan, who are willing to incur substantial debt to ensure their daughters go to the university or to imagine that family members at times need to pressure disillusioned daughters and sons to continue their education. This is not to say that families who act differently do not exist, but there are many whose efforts are completely excluded from the images presented in the report. Such omissions contribute to powerful stereotypes of "Arab women," who are constructed as ahistorical beings existing outside their social reality; the report lumps the experiences of millions into an all-encompassing category that glosses over differences in class, ethnicity, nationality, and the range of other factors that shape life circumstances. The human capabilities approach used to frame the discussions of Arab women also delegitimizes the very real dilemmas young women face in making decisions about their education, marriage, and careers.

My analysis of the *AHDR 2005* points to larger issues surrounding the way in which development is conceptualized and, to be more specific, the assumptions about women's development and empowerment. Despite assertions about development as freedom or expansion of choices, the idea of "development" has embedded in it assumptions about proper choices and outcomes. These are shaped by a liberal, modernist discourse and the demands of global capitalist forces, which have framed development policy and priorities since the inception of the development industry in the 1950s. Furthermore, despite the call for development to be remade with an emphasis on human ends and choices, economic demands and neoliberal economic determinants still frame the indicators of

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development successes. The core assumptions embedded in the "education as panacea"[73] perspective are essentially that women will be empowered to have fewer children and join the workforce. Waged labor will in turn further empower them to take control of their own lives. When women who should be developed because they are educated do not conform to these assumptions, answers are sought elsewhere—in the culture, religion, or family.

The arguments laid out here also point to another important dilemma of development, namely, the need to construct problems and to fit these problems into predefined categories. It is clear that the region grapples with gender issues that need to be addressed; however, the status of education for girls in most of the region could have provided an opportunity to highlight progress or success or to examine the economic constraints that make certain educational goals still unattainable. Given the poor status of boys' education in several Arab countries (both in terms of access and performance), "gender" in this instance might have allowed for a discussion of boys' and girls' deprivation—particularly rural and poor children—in some of the countries with the most troubling indicators. Such an approach could have opened the door to more serious discussion of class issues, of rural underdevelopment, and of other forms of persistent exclusion that shape the life chances of young people in the region today. Furthermore, greater attention to the employment opportunities actually available to women and men could have provided material for a critical analysis of neoliberal economic policies, labor exploitation (which is intertwined with a global flow of labor), and shrinking public services and their gendered effects.

Development discourse, rooted in a colonial discourse about native backwardness, consistently contributes to negative representations of Third World "others." Although the efforts to forge new ground by putting forth Arab human development reports are admirable, the decision to frame the issues as Arab ones may undermine the intentions of this project because this discursive representation produces an image of Arab pathology—most specifically the pathological family and "male culture"—as the primary obstacle to women's development. In the process, the coercive power of global economic institutions and Western governments in shaping development choices is given insufficient space even though the definition of desirable "development" emanates directly from the discourse of these powerful forces. What the *AHDR 2005* produces is another body of development "knowledge" about Arab women that remains distant from the varied life experiences of millions of women in the region and fails to challenge these dominant frames of analysis.

NOTES

Author's Note: An earlier version of this paper was first presented at Columbia University in February 2007 for a panel entitled "Empowering Arab Women? Assessing the *Arab Human Development Report*." I thank Toni Sethi for inviting me to be a part of this panel. Some of the ideas in the introduction were presented as part of a lecture I gave at the launching of the Clovis and Hala Maksoud Chair in Arab Studies at Georgetown University in October 2007. This lecture was published as an Occasional Paper by the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University in the fall of 2008. An earlier version of this paper was also presented at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting in November 2007, and I am grateful for the comments and feedback of co-panelists and audience members at each of these events. I also thank Lila Abu-Lughod, Betty Anderson, Frances Hasso, Mervat Hatem, and three anonymous *IJMES* reviewers for vital comments

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on earlier versions of this paper. The ethnographic work I draw upon in this article was made possible through a Fulbright Islamic Scholars Grant.

[1]United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* (New York: Regional Bureau of Arab States, cosponsored with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Organizations, 2006). Please see the overview in this issue. Lila Abu-Lughod, Frances S. Hasso, and Fida J. Adely contributed to the following background note.

The *AHDR 2005*, published online in Arabic and English in December 2006, is the last volume in a four-part series focused on development in Arab-identified states and territories. A research and policy document as well as visionary political statement, this 230-page report (plus eighty pages of charts, statistics, and references) was produced over several years through the research, writing, and editing of over seventy-five individuals from the Arab world, including some of its most prominent social researchers and feminists.

The AHDRs were produced under the auspices of and governed by the UNDP. The first, the *ADHR 2002*, presents and comparatively analyzes various indicators in Arab states and highlights three major "deficits" hindering human development that are addressed in depth in the volumes that follow: "Building a Knowledge Society" (2003), "Towards Freedom in the Arab World" (2004), and "Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World" (2005).

[2]Mahbub ul Haq, *Reflections on Human Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14.

[3]This initial report was followed annually by a new global human development report, each new release grappling with a new dimension of human development, with topics ranging from gender to democracy to technology and human rights. The UNDP's Human Development Report Office maintains a website (http://hdr.undp.org) with information about the global reports as well as national human development reports that have been developed by select countries.

[4]I am indebted to Mervat Hatem for reminding me that the discourse of choices in and of itself was not necessarily a departure from the essential components of earlier development discourse.

[5]Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1999), 75.

[6]Ibid., 62.

[7]Ibid., 63.

[8]Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

[9]Nussbaum, "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice," *Feminist Economics* 9 (2003): 33–59, 34.

[10]Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 5.

[11]In their recent work on educated and un- or underemployed males in northern India, Jeffrey, Jeffrey, and Jeffrey have argued that the emphasis on capabilities, such as education, as drivers for change can "divert attention away from social struggles over the values and uses of education in situations of economic uncertainty." Craig Jeffrey, Patricia Jeffery, and Roger Jeffrey, *Degrees without Freedom? Education, Masculinities and Unemployment in Northern India* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 8.

[12]I put "Arab women" in quotes here because one key concern about such reports is the way in which "Arab women" become a category that is essentialized as some homogenous group without sufficient attention to class differences, rural/urban disparities, and so forth. The body of scholarship critiquing this essentialization of Third World women or the feminine other has a long history aided in large part by postcolonial theory and its call for the interrogations of such representations. Within feminist scholarship, Chandra Mohanty's work in this vein has been seminal. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary* 2, no. 12 (1984): 333–58. See also Frances S. Hasso, "Empowering Governmentalities Rather than Women: The *Arab Human Development Report 2005* and Western Development Logics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009): 63–82 (this issue).

[13]For a review of this research, see Kevin Watkins, *Oxfam Education Report* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxfam Publishing, 2000), and Robert LeVine, Sarah LeVine, and Beatrice Schnell, "Improve the Woman": Mass Schooling, Female Literacy, and Worldwide Social Change," *Harvard Educational Review* 71 (2001): 1–50.

[14]Watkins, *Oxfam Education Report*.

[15]Elizabeth M. King and M. Ann Hill, *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits, and Policies* (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Watkins, *Oxfam Education Report*.

[16]LeVine et al., "Improve the Woman"; Watkins, *Oxfam Education Report.*

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[17]For a critique of this perspective, see Frances Vavrus, *Desire and Decline: Schooling amid Crisis in Tanzania* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003).

[18]Watkins, *Oxfam Education Report*.

[19]Ibid.; LeVine et al., "Improve the Woman."

[20]World Bank, *Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2004), 1.

[21]World Bank, *Gender and Development*, 1–2.

[22]World Bank, *The Economic Advancement of Women in Jordan: A Country Gender Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Social and Economic Development Group, Middle East and North Africa Region, 2005).

[23]UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, i.

[24]Asef Bayat, "Transforming the Arab World: The *Arab Human Development Report* and the Politics of Change," *Development Practice* 36 (2005): 1225–37, 1230.

[25]Kamran Ali's research on family-planning programs in Egypt is informative here. He argues that despite a family-planning discourse on helping women achieve their rights as individuals to make choices related to their bodies and fertility, "choices are determined by a medical discourse and practice linked to the development agenda." Kamran Ali, *Planning the Family in Egypt: New Bodies, New Selves* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2002), 60.

[26]See Ingemar Fagerlind and Lawrence Saha, *Education and National Development*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pergamon, 1989) for a discussion about mass public schooling as a very contemporary notion. For example, in the United States and Great Britain, the notion of providing public education to the masses only took off in earnest in the 20th century after much public debate about whether the masses need to be educated and for what purposes.

[27]UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 73.

[28]Ibid., 7.

[29]Education is almost always synonymous with formal schooling in the report. However, in at least one instance, literacy rates for females over fifteen are used as a proxy for levels of education in the Arab world. The use of literacy rates as an indicator of levels of education and progress in the expansion of educational access is problematic given that the educational development efforts of countries are typically targeted toward children and illiteracy is most prevalent among older age cohorts, reflecting the limited educational opportunities available historically. See Nadia Farah, "Arab Women's Development: How Relevant are UNDP Measurements?" *Middle East Policy* XIII (2006): 38–47.

[30]Timothy Mitchell makes an analogous critique of development documents and their representation of the "overpopulation" problem in Egypt, arguing that is often unclear to what "over" is referring. Timothy Mitchell, "America's Egypt: Discourse of the Development Industry," *Middle East Report* 169 (1991): 18–34, 36.

[31]UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 74. The reader has only to move on to the next page to figures 2–5, which display female enrollment as a percentage of male enrollment at all levels of education. According to the data in this figure, half of the twenty countries for which data are provided have an equal ratio of girls to boys. Furthermore, in nine Arab countries the ratio of females is greater than that of males, and in five countries the gap between females and males is less than 10 percent.

[32]Ibid., 76.

[33]UNDP, *AHDR 2004*, 235.

[34]Central Intelligence Agency, The World Fact Book, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cn.html (accessed 18 October 2007).

[35]UNESCO Institute for Statistics, http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=2620&BR_Region=40525 (accessed 30 September 2008).

[36]Roy Carr-Hill, "Educational Services and Nomadic Groups in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda," in *The Education of Nomadic Peoples: Current Issues, Future Prospects*, ed. Caroline Dyer (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 50.

[37]UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 77.

[38]According to the World Bank, the gross secondary-school enrollment in Yemen was 60 percent for males and 26 percent for females in 2004–5, http://www.ds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2008/02/28/000333038_20080228234736/Rendered/PDF/417730PAD0P0891ly10IDA1R20081-

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003611.pdf (accessed 30 September 2008). Yemen had the largest gender gap of these three countries. For Djibouti, gross secondary enrollment was 27 percent for males and 18 percent for females in 2006 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics). In Mauritania, the gross secondary-school enrollment was 27 percent for boys and 23 percent for girls in 2006, http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=4780&BR_Region=40525 (accessed 30 September 2008).

[39]UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, 2005.

[40]Maureen Lewis and Marlaine Lockheed, *Inexcusable Absence: Why 60 Million Girls Still Aren't In School and What to Do About It* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2007). Although Lewis and Lockheed set out to write a book about girls' exclusions, their focus on issues surrounding "excluded sub-groups" of various types points to a barrier that goes beyond gender, although it may be compounded by gender.

[41]Ibid., 32.

[42]UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 79.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Engineering Workforce Commission, *Engineering and Technology Enrollments: Fall 2005* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Engineering Societies, Engineering Workforce Commission, 2006).

[46]Ibid.

[47]The superiority accorded to particular fields of study, namely, the scientific, medical, and technological fields, is consistent in the development literature on education. In the most recent World Bank report about education in the Middle East and North Africa, one of the key indicators used in the bank's assessment of educational quality in the region is the number of students enrolled in the sciences, engineering, and medicine. World Bank, *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2008).

[48]UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 91.

[49]Another important expected choice discussed in the report is participation in the political sphere, with politics narrowly defined as participation through election to office. In both respects—economic and political—the decision to frame women's development and proper use of human capabilities in such a manner precipitates and reproduces the ways in which traditionally male activities are given greater value, UNDP, *AHDR 2005*; Lila Abu-Lughod, "Dialects of Women's Empowerment: The International Circuitry of the *Arab Human Development Report 2005,*" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009): 83–103 (this issue).

[50]See Hoda Hoodfar, *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997).

[51]Almost across the board, development documents and the broader literature on women's labor-force participation acknowledge the limits of official statistics in capturing the true extent of women's economic contributions, let alone their important labor in maintaining households and families. Yet these documents continue to make assessments about the status of women's development and economic opportunity based on these limited categories, data, and definitions of work—and in some instances explicitly devalue forms of work that are not easily measured. See Farah, "Arab Women's Development."

[52]UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 79.

[53]A recent phenomenon in the United States makes a useful comparison here. In response to decreasing male enrollment in undergraduate institutions, some U.S. universities have unofficially begun lowering the standards for male applicants. See Jennifer D. Britz, "To All the Girls I Have Rejected," *New York Times*, 23 March 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/23/opinion/23britz.html?_r=1&oref=slogin (accessed 30 September 2008); John Tierney, "On Campus, A Good Man is Hard to Find," *New York Times*, 25 March 2006, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A0DE3D81730F936A15750C0A9609C8B63 (accessed 30 September 2008); Tamar Lewin, "At Colleges Women are Leaving Men in the Dust," *New York Times*, 9 July 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/09/education/09college.html?scp=1&sq=At+Colleges+Women+are+Leaving+Men+in+the+Dust&st=nyt (accessed 30 September 2008).

[54]UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 83.

[55]For an earlier construction of the Arab family in these terms, see Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: University Press, 1988).

[56]Abu-Lughod, "Dialects of Women's Empowerment."

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[57]Jennifer Olmsted, "Is Paid Work the (Only) Answer? Women's Well-Being, Neoliberalism, and the Social Contract in Southwest Asia and North Africa," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2 (2005): 112–39, 112, 131.

[58]Linda Hirshman, "Off to Work She Should Go," *New York Times*, 25 April 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/25/opinion/25hirshman.html?_r=1&oref=slogin (accessed 30 September 2008).

[59]"Change the World and That Diaper," letter to the editor, *New York Times,* 27 April 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/27/opinion/l27work.html?_r=1&oref=slogin (accessed 30 September 2008).

[60]Hirshman, "Off to Work She Should Go."

[61]"Change the World and That Diaper."

[62]My research was based in northern Jordan in a city of about 30,000 people. I conducted ethnographic research primarily in one secondary school, visited and interviewed families of the adolescent girls with whom I interacted daily, and spent a significant amount of time visiting, speaking with, and interviewing teachers, the overwhelming majority of whom were women from the local community.

[63]All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

[64]See Olmsted, "Is Paid Work the (Only) Answer?" as well as Mervat Hatem, "In the Shadow of the State: Changing Definitions of Arab Women's Developmental Citizenship Rights," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1 (2005): 20–45.

[65]Some local governments have pursued a policy of promoting employment for lower-income women in low-wage manufacturing jobs in newly constructed "free-trade zones." The low wages and the exploitive nature of many of these jobs leave them less than desirable and not always economically viable. For an argument about the importance of such low-wage jobs for female entry into the labor force, see Valentine Moghadam, "Women's Economic Participation in the Middle East: What Difference Has the Neoliberal Policy Turn Made?" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1 (2005): 110–46. For perspectives on why such jobs may not be desirable and/or economically desirable, see Hoodfar, *Between Marriage and the Market*.

[66]Vavrus, *Desire and Decline*, 10.

[67]This perspective on the education of women has its roots in a modernizing discourse that is more than a century old, one that also has had distinct implications for the conceptualization of marriage. See Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women*: *Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[68]Fida Adely, "The Mixed Effects of Schooling for High School Girls in Jordan: The Case of Tel Yahya," *Comparative Education Review* 48 (2004): 353–73.

[69]In the twelfth grade, Jordanian students take the *tawjihi*, or high school completion exam. (The term also refers to twelfth grade itself.) Their score determines if they can study in a public university and what major they can choose. Students and families held a great deal of anxiety about this exam, given its role in deciding one's future and given that only about half of twelfth graders pass the exam. Furthermore, passing does not guarantee admission to a public university. In 2006, for example, of the 54,000 students who passed the exam, only 28,000 gained admission to public universities. Mohammad Ghazal, "Girls Take Top Spots in Six Streams of Exam," *Jordan Times,* 30 July 2006. Today in Jordan, as in several Arab countries, one increasingly finds private options for higher education, but the cost is too prohibitive for the majority of citizens.

[70]See Mervat Hatem on the "middle-class ideal that dealt with work as a choice" in her comparison of secular and Islamist discourses on women's work. She argues that their positions are both based on this ideal. "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Discourses Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal* 48 (1994): 661–76, 670.

[71]The barriers to accessing economic opportunities that education is assumed to provide have distinct class dimensions and are not solely a female phenomena. In many respects, because of the "breadwinner" expectations tied to masculinity in many parts of the world, limited economic opportunities and access to stable jobs even for schooled men present a male educational crisis. See Jeffrey et al., *Degrees without Freedom?*

[72]Abu-Lughod, "Dialects of Women's Empowerment."

[73]Vavrus, *Desire and Decline*, 7.

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