MIDDLE EASTERN INTERSECTIONALITY:

A Meta-Analysis on Scholarly Work about Women's Issues in the Middle East

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During the past few decades, many scholars in the social sciences, the humanities, and more specifically in women's and gender studies have studied women and gender-related issues in the Middle East using different theoretical and methodological perspectives. Some of those approaches include analyzing the issues of women within a patriarchal context (Joseph 1996; Kandiyoti 1988; Moghadam 2019), addressing women and gender issues focusing on the role of religion, specifically Islam (Ahmed 1982; Al-Rasheed 2013; Joseph 1991; Okkenhaug and Flaskerud 2005), and focusing on the influence of the state and law on women's lives in their society (Charrad 2011; Dwyer 1990; Maddy-Weitzman 2005; Maktabi 2010). Despite the numerous papers written about women and gender in the Middle East, Hasso (2005) argues that this field of study is limited since the standpoint that could address various systems of oppression imposed on women is from the research. Many scholars only try to study one or a few of the issues related to women and gender in the Middle East. In addition, they usually focus on these issues in one or a few social and political contexts in the Middle East. This paper argues that the challenges faced by women in the Middle East, which negatively impact their lives, result from their location at the intersection of multiple systems of oppression—including religion, patriarchy, domestic authoritarian governance, and the international neocolonial politics of the 'West' in the region.

In this paper, I am conducting a meta-analysis to provide a wider picture of the scholarly works written about gender and women's issues in the seventeen countries located in the Middle East to examine which systems of domination are receiving more scholarly attention in the analysis of women's problem in the different countries located in the Middle East. This type of larger analysis is necessary because women and gender-related issues in the Middle East, like everywhere else in the world, cannot be explained by focusing on just one single factor. Cultural, political, economic, and social dynamics of power comprise interwoven dominant systems that are determined by a number of intersecting identity categories such as gender, sexuality, race, class, disability. Therefore it is necessary to examine how all of these elements are working together (Gouws 2017).

It may seem that making such a comparative meta-analysis would be challenging due to the diverse population that is being analyzed in papers related to different countries in the region. While I acknowledge the diversity of the population in different social contexts like class and ethnicity, there are some common unifying experiences that can connect a wealthy Jewish woman in Tel Aviv with a poor Muslim woman in Yemen such as degrading women because of patriarchal systems in societies. I am aiming to see how matrices of domination are being addressed in papers of social scientists and gender scholars in the Middle East. My main research questions are: Is there any common pattern or element in the papers/books that address women's issues in the Middle East? If so, how do they differ? As Mohanty (2013)mentioned there is a need "for theory to address fundamental questions of systematic power and inequities and to develop feminist, antiracist analysis of neoliberalism, militarism, and heterosexism as nation-state building project" (968). Conducting an analysis about the ways different systems of domination are being addressed in scholarly papers provides a future steps toward answering the broader question on theorizing women's problems in the region. Realizing a working feminist theory that is applicable across the Middle East will provide future research with a tool for further investigation or allow for possible action-based solutions to the problems women in the Middle East face.

Intersectionality and Matrix of Domination

Intersectionality plays an important role in feminist studies as a responsive paradigm aimed at understanding the complexity of compounding oppressions and inequalities via an integrated approach toward the formation of a standpoint which articulates production and reproduction of social inequalities by taking various axes of social differentiation into account (Bilge 2010; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Collins 2002; Crenshaw 1989). The term intersectionality was introduced by Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) once she aimed to discuss the problems of black women's legal rights related to employment in the US. She introduces this term to be used toward recognition of the importance of studying the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination (Yuval-Davis 2006). Patricia Hill Collins (1998) was one of the first theorists who picked up the term when she was writing about family and state. Both Crenshaw and Collins used intersectionality as a framework to describe different sections of power structures interacting (Carbin and Edenheim 2013).

While intersectionality works as a functional concept or even as a buzzword (Davis 2008) which connects postmodern theories with contemporary politics, it seems necessary to see if this concept has been used as a theoretical tool to explain the globalized context. The process of theorizing gender hegemonized by the global north made the rich archive of gender analysis from the global south unacknowledged (Banerjee and Connell 2018). Much of the research on intersectionality focuses on African-American women and other women of color (Alexander-Floyd 2012; Banerjee and Connell 2018; Bhabha et al. 1992; Crenshaw 1991; Davis 1981; Ferber 1998; Harris 1990; Collins and Bilge 2016; Wacquant 1997; Williams 1991) and it seems that the research on intersectionality has not addressed the lives of Middle Eastern women enough yet. Therefore, it is necessary to give voice to the global south to show the importance of postcolonial[1] thinking about gender theory, interrogate the ways that western feminism fails to understand and meet the

Patricia Hill Collins referred to the "matrix of domination" to address the overall organization of power within any society. She employed intersectionality to signal the specific form taken by the complex of interconnected oppressions in the experiences of individuals throughout their lives. She employs the term matrix of domination to appoint the societal organizations (Bilge 2010). This concept has two main features, the first of which is related to the fact that any matrix has a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression and the ways that these systems socially and historically intersect with each other is unique. The other feature is "intersecting systems of oppression" (Collins 2002). She specifically talks about the four interconnected domains of power. Structural domain of power includes social structures like laws and polity, disciplinary domains of power that manage oppression. Hegemonic domain of power legitimates oppression and interpersonal domains of oppression that influence the everyday lives of people. Studying the matrix of domination in social science research that addresses the overall organization of power in society is not a new venture. However, the state of knowledge about matrix of domination in broader social context remains relatively disregarded because Collins did not discuss the structure of domination in transnational spaces (Purkayastha 2012). In particular, large-scale analyses in the social sciences have often overlooked intersecting systems of oppression. Postcolonial feminists have long criticized the absence of a comprehensive understanding of women's experiences in the Global South within feminist scholarship from the Global North (Al-wazedi 2020; Hamid 2006; Parshar 2017). They argue that such analyses frequently reduce women in the Global South to passive victims of either patriarchy or religion, failing to account for the complexities of their intersectional positions. While postcolonial feminist narratives on women in the Middle East have called for the use of intersectional frameworks in analyzing gender-related issues in the Global South, it remains essential to situate these analyses within the specific context of the Middle Eastern matrix of domination as a unique configuration of power that shapes the lived experiences of women in

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[1] Postcolonialism is a critical theory analysis of the culture, literature, history, and discourse as a reaction to European imperial power.

the region. This framework helps us to explain how various social divisions' positions women differently considering matrices of domination in their social world.

It should be mentioned that there is much written about the Middle East but most of the research tries to address one or a few issues related to women and gender in the Middle East. Although the work that has been done by scholars in the Middle East has made a difference in the broader study of women and gender (Moghadam 2008), there are few resources that have studied intersectionality and various systems of oppression of women within the Middle East context (Al-Rebholz 2013; Ozkaleli 2015; Patil 2013; Salih, Welchman, and Zambelli 2016). Since intersectionality and the matrix of domination have become central concepts in feminist scholarship in the new millennium (Bilge 2010), with their significance elevated through contributions to feminist theory (McCall 2005), I seek to examine how scholars have addressed various systems of domination in their work on women and gender across Middle Eastern countries. To this end, I propose the 'Middle Eastern Matrix of Domination' as a framework for recognizing the interplay of neocolonial practices by the Global North, patriarchal norms, state regulations and repressive policies, and extremist religious orders in marginalizing and oppressing at least half of the population in the Middle East. The main questions that I want to address in this paper are: What are the main themes found through analysis? How could they be interpreted through the proposed Middle Eastern matrix of domination? This analysis will us help have a better understanding of women's common problems in the Middle East toward conducting a comprehensive research on intersectionality within a Middle Eastern context. Also, it enables us to find out the problems that attract the most attention and the ones that are not being addressed properly, in order to propose more responsive studies about women's and gender related issues in future.

Meta-Content-Analysis of Scholarly Work on Women and Gender in the Middle East

The stated questions above are examined with the assistance of a simplified meta-analysis of 170 articles published between about women and gender in the Middle East. The data set of the articles was created through the process of searching one general electronic- internet source for scholarly articles (https://scholar.google.com) using the following terms: gender, women, feminism, and name of each country in the Middle East. The search was restricted to the articles which were focusing on women and gender issues in each country through the lens of social sciences, psychology, gender studies, management, and business. Since I wanted to get a random sample of the available articles, I did not set a priority to get the more recent articles about women and gender in the Middle East[2]. The major limitation of this search was the bias toward the publications in English and the exclusion of articles focusing on women and gender in the Middle Eastern countries published in other languages. In addition, it is important to recognize that global academic publishing, particularly within English-dominated spaces, shapes which topics and types of research gain visibility, often leading to biases in the body of published work.

The Middle East includes seventeen countries (World Population Review, 2019) and the following table is the main demographic characteristics of each of them:

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[2] Theoretically, it might be a problem since it is the West writing about the East through a western lens. My study might be skewed toward patriarchy because western scholars look negatively upon Islamic patriarchies.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Middle East Countries

	Population	Major Language	Major Religion
Bahrain	1.4 million	Arabic	Islam
Cyprus	1.17 million	Greek, Turkish	Christian, Islam
Egypt	83.9 million	Arabic	Islam, Christianity
Iran	80 million	Persian	Islam
Iraq	37 million	Arabic, Kurdish	Islam
Israel	9,097 million	Hebrew	Jewish
Jordan	6.5 million	Arabic	Islam
Kuwait	4 million	Arabic	Islam
Lebanon	6 million	Arabic	Islam, Christianity
Oman	2.9 million	Arabic	Islam
Palestine	4.5 million	Arabic	Islam
Qatar	2.639 million	Arabic	Islam
Saudi Arabia	32 million	Arabic	Islam
Syria	21.1 million	Arabic	Islam, Christianity
Turkey	80.81 million	Turkish	Islam
United Arab Emirates	8.1 million	Arabic	Islam
Yemen	27.5 million	Arabic	Islam

Table 2: The Main Themes of Articles' Percentage[3]

	Race/Tribe	Class	Patriarchy	Religion	Economy	Laws	War	Government
Bahrain	10	-	60	50	20	30	-	30
Cyprus	-	-	70	10	-	-	20	60
Egypt	-	10	30	60	10	40	10	70
Iran	-	-	-	90	10	50	-	100
Iraq	-	-	30	30	10	40	60	60
Israel	30	30	50	30	10	10	30	30
Jordan	-	-	40	60	-	40	10	70
Kuwait	20	10	70	90	20	40	-	60
Lebanon	40	-	40	70	-	70	20	70
Oman	10	30	100	40	30	60	-	30
Palestine	20	-	40	50	-	30	60	70
Qatar	10	-	90	60	20	40	-	50
Saudi Arabia	-	-	80	70	10	50	-	60
Syria	10	-	50	80	10	30	40	50
Turkey	10	-	80	80	-	30	-	40
UAE	-	-	50	70	30	10	-	50
Yemen	20	-	60	70	10	60	-	30
Mean of Themes	10.6	4.7	55.3	59.4	11.2	37	14.7	54.7

Through an initial process of inductive coding, all 170 articles and books were carefully read and coded based on the key characteristics identified by the authors and the ways in which they addressed women's issues in the region. This process led to the identification of the most prevalent themes: race, class, religion, patriarchy, war, laws, government, and politics. Building on these themes and the Middle Eastern Matrix of Domination framework, a subsequent round of deductive coding was conducted to situate these themes within their specific geopolitical contexts, examining all the influential factors shaping women's social and private lives as discussed in the texts. Table 2 presents the results of this analysis of the 170 articles and books.

Results: An Overview

Patriarchy, government, and religion emerge as dominant themes in the analysis of gender-related scholarship across the Middle East. In Bahrain, patriarchy (60%) is rooted in tribal traditions and economic limitations, while laws and government (30%) influence women's status, and religion (50%) reinforces societal restrictions (Ebrahim 2016; Seikaly 1994; Al-Musawi 2016). Similarly, patriarchy (70%) is a critical theme in Cyprus, where women's organizations often operate within male-dominated political structures, limiting their capacity to challenge systemic gendr discrimination (Hadjipavlou & Mertan 2010). Government (60%) also plays a crucial role in reinforcing patriarchal portrayals of women in media (Aliefendioglu & Arslan 2011).

In Egypt, government (70%) and religion (60%) shape gender roles, with state policies historically affecting women's rights (Al-Ali 2002). While feminists critique religious restrictions on gender equality (Younis 2006), some Islamist feminists advocate for women's rights within an Islamic framework (Cole 1981). Iran's scholarship overwhelmingly emphasizes government (100%) and religion (90%) as interconnected forces shaping women's roles post-1979 revolution (Barlow & Akbarzadeh 2008). Feminists face state repression but utilize digital activism to resist gendered oppression (Tahmasebi-Birgani 2017), while Islamic feminists propose faith-based gender reforms (Ahmadi 2006).

War and government (60%) dominate Iraqi

[3] The sum is not equal to 100 because most of the articles have more than one theme.

scholarship, reflecting how political upheavals have impacted women's rights. While regime changes promised reform, they often worsened gender inequalities (Sjoberg 2008). In Israel, patriarchy (50%) is the most discussed theme, with race, class, and war (30%) also shaping gender discourse. Militarization and occupation reinforce gender hierarchies (Dahan-Kalev 2001; Sharoni 1992), and women's peace movements must navigate intersections of ethnicity, class, and gender (Shadmi 2000).

Across the Gulf, patriarchy, religion, and government shape women's lives. In Saudi Arabia, patriarchy (80%), religion (70%), and government (60%) reinforce male dominance despite historical women's movements advocating for education and rights (Al-Rasheed 2013; Al Alhareth, Al Dighrir 2015). Similarly, in Kuwait, religious and patriarchal structures hinder women's rights despite democratization efforts (Al Mughni 1993; Rizzo et al. 2002). In Yemen, religious patriarchy sustains discriminatory laws, including child marriage, though activists push for legal reform (Voinarevich 2015).

The Main Themes

A meta-analysis of the sample of published papers about issues related to gender and women studied in social sciences and humanities revealed the main themes of intersecting systems of oppression in the Middle Eastern countries. Those themes are racism, classism, patriarchy, religion, economy, laws, war, and polity/government. Finding all of the most repeated themes is crucial since common themes brought up in the papers/books can show the pattern of women's issues in the Middles East that could lead scholars toward conceptualizing and forming a responsive theory about women's issues in the region.

In the analysis of 170 articles, religion is the most important theme with the mean close to 60%. All of the counties in the Middle East have at least one article pointing out the influences of religion on women in their social lives. Iran and Kuwait have the highest focus on religion in articles (90%) which means almost all of the papers mentioned the role of religion on women's life. Kuwait's society has been experiencing an Islamic revival since 1993 (Al Mughni 1993). This could explain high level of focus on

religion's role in women's life. Iran also has a long history of religious movements, the most extreme form of which led to the Islamic Revolution in 1979. So, in the case of focusing on different ways of addressing women and gender in such an Islamic country, it is crucial to address Islam as an important influential factor (Razavi 2006).

Patriarchy is the second most important theme in the analysis appearing in 55.3% of articles. Almost all of the countries' papers about women and gender have focused on patriarchy showing the variation between 30% (Egypt and Iraq) to 100% (Oman). However, Iran's articles about women and gender do not show any focus on patriarchy. This leads us to the third important theme which is government/polity. The average percentage of government/polity in the articles is 54.7% but Iran shows the highest focus on the role of this theme and all of the papers related to Iran have the government/polity theme. This can be explained by the fact that after the Islamic revolution in 1979, an Islamic government has ruled Iran and many backward policies related to women have been established and affected women's situation in the country (Razavi 2006; Sanasarian 1982; Sedghi 2007). The cause of this increase in focus on the government theme also potentially explains the lack of importance of patriarchy in analysis about women in Iran. It seems that there is a relationship between the level of attention to patriarchy and government in the papers/books[4]. It seems that scholars put more emphasis on the role of government on women's lives when there is a powerful controller government is in ruling the country. On the other hand, the role and importance of patriarchal system in the women's lives degraded or decreased since patriarchal government try to impose patriarchal rules on women's lives.

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[4] I run a Pearson Correlation between patriarchy and government/polity using SPSS to see if there is any meaningful relationship between the importance of patriarchy and government in papers. The result shows a moderate negative linear relationship (r= -.671) between patriarchy and government in the analysis of main themes of the articles related to gender and women in the Middle East.

The fourth theme I found in the articles is laws, which was featured in 37% of papers. Almost all the countries' articles have at least one paper that talks about the importance and influence of laws on women in the Middle Eastern countries. The only country that has not shown laws as the main theme in Cyprus. The absence of this theme from the sample of papers related to Cyprus seems to be related to the importance of male dominancy and patriarchy as the main themes in analysis on women and gender in the Cypriot social context. War is the fifth important theme that is focused on in 14.7% of articles. High percentages of this theme in articles related to Palestine (60%), Iraq (60%), and Syria (40%), and Israel (30%) are likely due to the fact that these countries have experienced conflict and unrest for many years that influenced women's lives adversely and signal the importance of the relationship between gender and transnationalism in the context of war and peace building in the Middle East (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009).

Economy (11.2%), Race/Tribe (10.6%), and Class (4.7) are the least most repeated themes in the analysis of main themes about women and gender in the Middle Eastern countries. Although finding these themes in the sample of articles does show the importance of political economy's interconnection with class, gender, and race/tribe within gendered contexts (Anthias 2014), ultimately these themes were addressed in small numbers of papers since the structural systems of dominations were the most important theoretical tools used by scholars to address women's and gender issues in the region.

Which Domains of Power Are Getting More Attention?

The current meta-analysis on women and gender related issues featured in papers/books about the Middle East helps me to find out which domains of power get more attention, and which domains of power need to be addressed more in future research. As shown in table ², religion, government/polity, patriarchy, law, war, and economy are the important themes in the analyzed articles related to the Middle Eastern countries. All of the mentioned themes can be categorized in the structural domain of power that includes social systems that organize power relations (Collins 2005). Having a long history of patriarchy within religious contexts, ruling by male-dominated government that articulate laws to rule societies lead most of the scholars to focus on the structural domains of power, once they want to study women and gender issues in the Middle Eastern countries.

The analysis of 170 papers published on the topic of women and gender in the Middle East reveals several key insights. First, it highlights how patriarchal culture and rules shape women's lives and deaths, with evidence on honor killings, family and domestic violence, body ownership, control over outfits, and guardianship through the lens of heteropatriarchy (Arvin et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991). In addition, it shows the centrality and importance of religion in shaping women's experiences, examining how Islamic laws, based on various interpretations, leave women vulnerable to intimate and state violence. Additionally, the conflict between Zionism and Islam is introduced as a significant point worth further exploration, considering its profound impact on the region's socio-political dynamics. Third, this analysis highlights the importance of politics on the living situation of women in the region. Considering the state polices in the region, the adverse life situation of women has been even more exacerbated by national political systems establish laws to control women (Crenshaw, 1991). In addition, the neocolonial actions of the "west" in the name of the war on terror in the Middle East negatively affects women's lives (Erevelles, 2011; Puar, 2017; Russo, 2019).

The findings highlight how patriarchy, government policies, and religious ideologies collectively shape women's experiences across the Middle East region. While feminist movements persist in challenging systemic gender discrimination, entrenched political and religious structures continue to pose significant barriers to gender equality (Jamal 2001; Golkowska 2014; Al-Rasheed 2013).

As shown in the analysis, themes such as sexuality, migration, disability, and interpersonal power dynamics and gender-based violence are notably missing from much of the literature. For future studies, since women status is

is influenced greatly by various factors like class, tribal groups' values, cultural values, familial forms and values, sexual orientation, domestic violence, and so on, interviewing a representative sample of women and sexual minorities in each of the Middle Eastern countries will enable researchers to find the similarities and differences in women's lived experiences to form and analyze the interpersonal domain of power influencing on women's lives in the Middle East. In addition, analyzing laws related to women and sexual minorities in each of the countries will help to find out the ways that gendered oppression is being legitimized in similar or variant ways in Middle East. It is necessary to see all four domains of power as interconnected systems. Such analysis will help us to create a dynamic system that understands the contradictions of oppressions toward formation comprehensive standpoint theory about Middle Eastern feminist thoughts dealing with complexities of matrices of domination in the region.

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