

Valentine M. Moghadam. *Women, Work, and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa.*

Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998. xi+259 pp. Acronyms. Bibliography. Figure. Index. Tables.
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Women, Work, and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa evaluates women's labor in changing global economies, by focussing on case studies in West Asia (Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and Iran) and North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria.) It contributes to gender & development studies, a growing field among economists, sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists. A basic premise of this field is that women in all societies face fundamental disadvantages, and that gender issues are central to economic and social development worldwide.

Some gender & development specialists maintain that all societies have "gender contracts" -- implicit expectations about labor-market and family roles for men and women. Valentine M. Moghadam applies this idea to the urban, non-agricultural societies of the Middle East and North Africa, where she identifies a "patriarchal gender contract" based on "male breadwinner/female homemaker roles" (p. 9). The oil boom economies of the 1960s and '70s reinforced this model by strengthening the position of males as providers and household heads. However, with the end of the boom in the 1980s and 1990s, opportunities for oil-industry employment declined, men's wages fell, and more women began to seek jobs outside the home to bolster family income. At the same time, regional economies entered a new phase of private-sector industrial growth, export orientation, and globalization. Against this context, Moghadam takes a descriptive and prescriptive approach: on the one hand identifying trends in women's educational attainment, employment, and earning power, on the other suggesting policy changes to improve women's representation in income-generating work.

Until recently, the representation of Middle Eastern and North African women in major occupational groups has been among the lowest in the world. But as economies change, so may this employment pattern. Moghadam wonders if a more egalitarian set of gender relations will emerge as more women enter the workforce, or if, amidst a "feminization of labor", women's employment rates will rise while their working conditions, income, and employment status erode. Moghadam explains the latter

possibility by noting that, globally, "Women's growing share of many kinds of jobs...has not been accompanied by a redistribution of domestic, household, and child-care responsibilities. Moreover, women are still disadvantaged in the new labor markets, in terms of wages, training, and occupational segregation; they are also disproportionately involved in the nonregular forms of employment that are increasing: temporary, part-time, casual, or home-based work" (p. 13).

Moghadam suggests that the best route to empowerment for women is education. The more education women obtain, the more they are likely to participate and achieve in the labor force, and the less vulnerable to poverty they become. Economies also benefit from women's educational development, since national incomes rise as the size and skill of the labor force grow. On a societal level, meanwhile, researchers have shown that women's educational advancement leads to better family health, more family planning, and lower infant and children mortality rates. With illiteracy so prevalent among North African women (consider Morocco's female illiteracy rate of 69%), the need for educational development is urgent. But various social barriers to development exist, such as the deterrent of high educational costs for individuals (prompting families of restricted means to concentrate resources on sons) and expectations of early marriage for females. Convinced that non-government organizations have an important role to play in overcoming these obstacles and promoting constructive change, Moghadam devotes a concluding chapter to the activities of women's NGOs in the region.

Valentine M. Moghadam presents a thoroughly researched study with a wealth of detail. Furthermore, in *Women, Work, and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, she goes far beyond the regional unit specified in the title. While scrutinizing women's employment patterns in the Middle East and North Africa, she considers gender and labor issues cross-culturally. Africanists interested in comparative political economies of gender, labor, development, and education will benefit from this book, and will particularly appreciate its first two chapters, which survey recent scholarship in the gender & development field worldwide.

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