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The 1982 Mexican financial debacle shocked Western lending agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, whose loans could not be serviced. In response, these agencies changed their priorities and tightened their criteria for loaning to the developing world. The World Bank abandoned its earlier emphasis on the basic needs approach as a means of poverty reduction in favor of measures aimed at avoiding debt service problems. The new strategy required current account surpluses to be achieved through reducing imports and expanding exports, discontinuing import substitution industrialization in favor of export-based growth, reducing government spending and intervention in the economy, privatizing government-owned industries, adopting deflationary macro-policies, and introducing legal and financial reforms to insure a secure and attractive investment environment. These measures came to be known as structural-adjustment policies. The outcome of these measures has been mixed: while some economic sectors experienced growth, others declined.

While some classes benefited handsomely, others lost their already meager livelihood. Whereas richer economies experienced some positive gains, the poorer economies were drowned in more debt and economic misery.

What were the effects of these measures on women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)? *Women, Work, and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa* by Valentine Moghadam explores how women have fared as a result of these latest economic reforms in the MENA countries. The book is a comprehensive survey of women's labor status in these countries in light of globalization processes, economic privatization, and structural adjustment reforms. Using the women-in-development/gender-and-development (WID/GAD) approach, Moghadam looks at women's employment patterns, prefer-
ences, and opportunities in these countries and examines variations in the relationship between women's measured labor-force participation and unreported, unpaid, and undervalued domestic labor. She attempts to correlate this participation with gender ideology and developments in the political economy of these countries. She believes that ideology alone does not explain women's low labor participation and differential wages. Rather, political and economic factors underlie the gender contract by systematically undervaluing women's labor and excluding them from engagement in the productive sectors of the economy.

With her characteristic thoroughness, Moghadam attempts to determine what these latest economic reforms have meant for gender relations in Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iran, and Algeria. She selects these countries because their economies are more diverse than some other MENA countries, allowing for a closer examination of changes and developments affecting women. She believes that in oil-based economies, like Saudi Arabia's, there are fewer chances for women's participation in the labor force because the oil industry is generally capital-intensive and male-intensive and demands a set of skills often denied to women in those countries.

The economies of MENA countries are at different stages of liberalization, and not all countries have embraced and succeeded in implementing the measures often suggested by the foreign lending institutions. For instance, Iran’s economy is very much dependent on oil revenue and the least restructured, while Tunisia and Morocco are the farthest along in the process of economic liberalization. Female labor-force participation in these countries is varied too, even though it is relatively low compared to that in many other countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Tunisia and Morocco have the highest levels of female participation. However, since both have a relatively small public sector, most women are found in the private manufacturing and informal sectors. In Iran, female unemployment has been high and women have encountered numerous challenges in the past two decades. Despite these challenges, Moghadam concludes, women are represented in more occupations and professions than in the past. Turkey is the most industrialized MENA country, yet it has a small women labor force, which is marginalized as a result of its privatization program. With a high rate of population growth, Egypt faces serious challenges as it begins to cut back its public sector, where most women are employed. In Jordan, most workers, male and female, are located in the service sector, though the benefits to be had are mostly within the private sector, where women receive low priority. In Syria, high population growth is pushing women out of the market. In Algeria, where women’s labor participation is the smallest, privatization has pushed many women into home-based industries. The fundamentalist challenge in this country has had the most negative effect on women.

Though structural adjustment programs and liberalization policies have had different effects on each of these countries and each government has responded with its own tailored plan to these changes, by and large these measures cause disproportionate hardship for women because, as they are implemented, employment opportunities decline and many women lose their formal jobs. As governments reduce their hiring in the public sector, women are forced to compete in the private, often informal, sector, where men have comparative advantages and where legal measures protecting women against discrimination
and abuse do not exist. Further, currency devaluation, rising inflation, and cuts in welfare spending reduce the purchasing power of families and allowances to women, thus increasing their unpaid domestic labor burdens as they have to care for their family members. Participation of women in the informal sector might increase as a result of reduction in the formal sector. However, in the informal market women face more challenges because their labor is legally less protected, socially less supported, and financially less valued. Moghadam believes that the unregulated informal sector is not a suitable place for women because they are employed out of desperation, subjected to more abuses, and exposed to more uncertainties and undue competition, especially when compared with those in government jobs. Where then should women go? Moghadam favors the public and formal sector. She proposes an enlarged public sector, coupled with quality training programs for women.

The impact of globalization on women has been mixed and contradictory. While by and large opportunities for female employment have increased (the feminization of labor), especially in the services and in export-oriented manufacturing, in many cases their real wages have declined and access to secure and female-friendly jobs are limited (the feminization of poverty). The negative consequences of these developments become more pronounced when we take into account several cultural, political, and economic factors. These include a gender contract that relegates women to subordinate positions in various sectors of the society; barriers to educational opportunity for women; family laws and civil codes that uphold patriarchal attitudes and standards; intra-household inequalities, lack of mobility for female labor; and lack of adequate infrastructure to support women's participation in the labor force. Increasing military expenditures and the rise of political Islam in MENA countries compounds these barriers. What should be done? Moghadam argues that governments should encourage women's education and health, increase female employment opportunities, and develop measures to protect women against the negative effects of the gender contracts in these societies.

Women have not been unresponsive to these changes. In the mid-1980s, these countries experienced an explosion of collective activities by women in NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and PVOs (private voluntary organizations). These efforts received a shot in the arm from the United Nations' grassroots efforts in furthering the cause of women and organizing several conferences during 1990s. The rise of global feminism and the growing awareness of disadvantages experienced by women, along with an understanding of the importance of women's economic contributions to the family, have created a friendlier atmosphere for female activism. Women's organizations in MENA countries are now involved in a variety of activities: offering social services, defending women and children's human rights, participating in social and political processes, raising awareness about the environment, fighting violence against women, providing help and support for female entrants to labor markets, and so on. Moghadam offers a new classification of women's NGO's and discusses the problems and challenges faced by these organizations. She stresses that the most important strategy for these organizations is increased cooperation and coordination among them.

Moghadam believes that increasing women's education, employment, and activ-
ism in NGOs and other organizations would compensate for the negative consequences of these market reforms and even lead to a new gender contract. She puts a great deal of faith in women's employment as a means of achieving equality and preparing the ground for developing more egalitarian gender relationships. If women are allowed to gain appropriate skills and enter the work force, slowly a change in patriarchal attitudes will follow. There is nothing intrinsic about the market economy, especially privatization, that would prevent women from participating in the labor market, as long as the state takes a more active role in social policy by developing protective and supportive measures in the area of female employment and by involving women's organizations and NGOs in the decision-making process.

Moghadam's recommendations and proposals for changing women's status in MENA countries are progressive and meritorious. However, she fails to tell us how these proposals can be implemented in the context of globalization, structural adjustment, and privatization. Are the states in these societies so autonomous that they can engage in the kind of activism Moghadam proposes? How can these states be so activist despite free market constraints, pressures from international financial agencies, and demands from their national and comprador bourgeoisie? How can they increase taxes while they are being asked to cut them? The neo-liberal policy advocated through structural adjustment program views, and discourages this kind of state activism as anti-business and anti-growth. These programs give primacy to finance over production as the engine of economic progress. MENA states are pressured by the IMF and World Bank to abandon their distributive and developmental roles in favor of a regulatory role in setting business-friendly exchange rates, interest rates, and tax policies. Even capital accumulation, a traditional function of the capitalist state in these regions, is now being articulated through financial processes controlled by private multinational capital markets. Social decentralization in the context of political centralization and oligarchic politics, as is the case in most of the MENA countries, does not automatically translate into democratization and egalitarian gender relationships, even though it is a step in that direction. Changing state social policies requires a change in the political framework within which unequal gender relationships are reproduced. Moghadam does not say much about the political frameworks of the states in these societies.

Certainly market economies are not inherently misogynist. However, as the author knows very well, they operate on private motives and most often engage in exploitative activities in order to maximize profits. At least until recently, women and children have been an easier target of this profit maximization. Capitalism has never shied away from exploitation of women and has often done a great deal to have access to their cheap labor. While the integration of women into the economy is an important step in the direction of enabling them to gain more control over their lives, it is not a holistic solution to the problem of gender inequality. Interestingly, the experiences of women in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European economies demonstrate that access to the labor market, while necessary, is not sufficient for achieving equality. A more recent approach, known as "women, environment, and alternative development" (WED) concerns itself with the nature of the
economy and the kind of development for which women are mobilized. Moghadam’s sharp criticisms of the gender contract need to be extended to the capitalist labor contract as well. As Moghadam is well aware, the latter is no less exploitative, instrumental, and irrational than the former. A political economic critique of the state and market practices in the MENA countries cannot be indifferent to the institutions that engineer and finance neo-liberal reforms. While unequal relationships between men and women in these economies are rightly questioned, the nature of the international relations of domination and subordination and the role of multinational corporations, Western governments, and international lending agencies are not. National governments and businesses are not the only culprits in the plight of women in these countries. Multinational corporations are the major forces behind the deplorable work conditions of women in low-tech, low-wage jobs in “global factories.”

All said, Moghadam’s book is a major contribution to our understanding of current economic factors underlying women’s low status in MENA countries. It offers a remarkably rich comparative analysis of labor markets and the position of women in the MENA countries. Moghadam’s goals in this book are ambitious and overreaching and she had done an excellent job of achieving them. The work is interdisciplinary in nature, comparative in approach, global in scope, regional in focus, and balanced in terms of theory and empirical facts. It is well researched, well written, and masterfully presented. Moghadam crosses the disciplinary boundaries very smoothly and creatively. Her study is as much sociology as it is economics and gender studies. Her data are not limited to the existing government statistics and secondary sources. She has done fieldwork in all but one of the eight countries she discusses. Scholars of the Middle East and North Africa, women’s studies, gender and development studies, sociology, and economics will find great insights in this work. The book merits course adoption and should be read by anyone interested in the comparative understanding of women’s status.