

legitimizing their participation in domains other than that of the family. Despite the progress, Berkovitch acknowledged that the fight for women's equality is far from over. Indeed, the prominence of the principle of equality exposed the extent of discrimination and injustice experienced by women around the world.

The social construction of women changed again in the 1970s and 1980s with increased attention to questions of national development (itself fueled by decolonization, the creation of many new nation-states and the contrast between the have and the have-not nations). Development further blurred the gendered nature of women, who came to be viewed as "valuable resources" essential for full national development. The world polity now defined women as "underutilized human resources" and sex discrimination as "economic waste". The need to maximize women's labor led the international organizations to add a "women's component" to the range of global activities. It expanded the number of government units dealing with women's issues and triggered the proliferation of women's movements of all kinds. The fusion of women with development culminated in three UN-initiated world conferences. The UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) fueled the emergence of an international network of women's organizations, and "helped to put women's issues on the agenda of nation-states to an extent not known before" (p. 139). In line with her thesis, Berkovitch argues that "a very specific set of guidelines, articulated by major global organizations was responsible for this world wide coordinated action by different nations" (p.17), that made the discourse on women an integral part of the global agenda and the laws of many lands.

Whether or not one accepts Berkovitch's emphasis on world polity as a source for major social change, the author makes the case "that history of women's rights is implicated in the history of world polity" (p. 17). This short but complex book provides extensive, important and fascinating information about presence, activities, and relationship of international women's organizations, from their beginnings to the development of national and international women's rights agendas during the 20th century. It adds significantly to what we know about our own national women's movements, reveals the world-wide power of sexism and patriarchal power structures, and recommends continued work by the global sisterhood on the international stage.

Area Studies and Social Science Strategies for Understanding Middle East Politics

Edited by Mark Tessler with Jodi Nachtwey and Anne Banda
Indiana University Press. 1999. pp. 200.

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At first glance the title and the question posed on the back cover, 'How should scholars construct knowledge about politics, economics and international relations in major world regions?' ought to make this a book with appeal to a

wide audience, and especially to readers of this journal. The subtitle of the introductory chapter, *The Area Studies Controversy* and the first page quickly reveal, however, that the volume's subject matter and its aim are far narrower. The main purpose of this book is to engage in the current debate over the future of area studies and to underscore the value of Middle East studies or, more specifically, to defend the study of Middle East Politics in North America. The editors state at the outset: the essays show that research which draws upon and integrates social science and area studies perspectives yields valuable results in the study of the Middle East

The issues at stake and the background to this debate are familiar to most and are laid out clearly and succinctly in the opening chapter of the book. Critics of area studies make the charge that the work of regional specialists is largely descriptive, lacks analytical rigor, is overly pre-occupied with detail and specificity, and has little theoretical or comparative value. In January 1997, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ran an article charging that 'a focus on individual regions leads to work that is mushy' (p.vii), not that Middle East studies has been immune to criticism from those in its own ranks. In his presidential address to the Middle East Studies Association, Rashid Khalidi called upon Middle East specialists to be part of the discourse within the social science disciplines or otherwise run the risk of 'stagnation, provincialism and ultimately extinction'.

In response, area studies specialists contend that analytically oriented social scientists are busy developing models and theoretical frameworks divorced from the real world. These researchers, they claim, profess insight into regions and countries, with barely any understanding or knowledge of the history, language and culture of those places, happy to rely, at best, on a few basic secondary sources.

Area specialists and discipline-orientated social scientists frequently live in separate scholarly worlds. Time and funding constraints mean scholars attend separate conferences, they publish in different journals and are rarely familiar with each others' work. "As Lisa Anderson rightly argues few card carrying members of the American Political Science Association will be familiar with (or even aware of) Ghassan Salame's important book on the process of democratization process in the Muslim world *Democracy without Democrats*, to give one of many examples" (p.5).

The book comprises a series of essays, initially presented at a conference held at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, by a number of well-known Middle East specialists: (Lisa Anderson, John Entelis, Augustus Richard Norton, Clement Henry, Magda Kandil, Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, Laurie Brand, Baghat Korany, as well the three editors of the book). All the contributors are well-established scholars, known for work that is both analytically rigorous and empirically detailed. In each of the essays, the authors describe their work, how they went about their research, the methodologies and the overall contribution of their research to the fields of Middle East studies and political science. Yet, the essays break little new ground, since all the authors have

published their work previously either as books and/or as journal articles. Moreover, there is little reference to other work in their fields of research, so the reader is left uncertain as to whether they are ploughing a lonely furrow, or if they are representatives of a larger body of scholarship.

This volume is a collection of work undertaken by scholars based in North America rather than a review of the state of Middle East scholarship as a whole. There are no contributors from Europe and little reference to research undertaken outside of North America. More significantly, there are no voices from the Middle East (with the exception of Baghat Korany who teaches in a Canadian University, but is currently based at the American University in Cairo). Indeed, it is only Korany who makes any real reference to scholarship in the Arab world. Equally disappointing is the failure to suggest ways forward for area studies and to lay out ideas for a future research agenda. Only Anderson and Korany make a brief stab in this direction. Anderson offers three areas of potential inquiry: political liberalization and the nature of economic conditions and constraints; the role of norms in international relations; the 'new institutionalist' ideas about state formation. Korany proposes that area studies specialists should engage in cross regional collaborative research projects, whilst Brand calls for regional specialists to 'embrace and engage theory more consistently in order to make those primarily interested in theory take notice and 'read our work and take it seriously' (p.145).

Does any of this matter? Yes and No. Academia in the social sciences spends a vast amount of intellectual (and emotional) energy engaged in interdisciplinary and methodological debates. In many ways, the attacks on area studies have been overly exaggerated and the criticisms levelled against regional specialists often lack substance. Area studies specialists, as the contributors to this book clearly demonstrate, have long been engaged in applying social science theories in their work and undertaking the type of research that they have been accused of ignoring. At the same time, no-one likes their field of inquiry to be branded as "mushy". But there is more at stake than just professional pride. Academic appointments, promotions and Ph.D. funding are all dependent on peer review and the assessment by others as to the value and relevance of the field of research. At a time when the future of area studies is under increasing pressure from changing priorities of funding bodies and declining available research funds, the importance of the contribution of area studies needs to be stated. In that respect, this book makes a valuable contribution. But the battle is more likely to be fought in smoky committee rooms rather than on the printed page.