The Predicament Perpetuated: How Progress Toward Democracy and Gender Equality in the Arab World is Held Hostage by the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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ABSTRACT

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The Muslim world has a reputation for being the final frontier of both democracy and women’s emancipation. But recent studies suggest that it may actually be the Arab region, not the Muslim world in general, that is especially resistant to the global movements toward democracy and gender equality. This paper explores various factors that might explain these twin ‘Arab gaps’--factors such as oil-dependent
economies, robust tribal-patriarchal norms, the special cultural centrality of Islam, the anti-imperialist drive for cultural authenticity, and even the impact of one gap upon the other. While these explanations may each carry some weight, this paper argues that none of them is adequate to account for the Arab region’s democracy and gender-equality deficits. It concludes, rather, that these regional deficits are ultimately rooted—to an extent that is difficult to overestimate—in what Fouad Ajami calls ‘the Arab predicament,’ the political and intellectual crisis that engulfed the Arab world after its defeat by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War. Indeed, the culminating claim of this paper is that the searing Israeli defeat cemented in the social and political culture of Arab populations a keen ambition if not to reverse that humiliation, at least to resist the Western dominance it represents—a priority that has precipitated the region’s search for strong, charismatic leaders and high tolerance for muscular autocracy but also its rejection of gender equality in favor of indigenous gender norms.
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Chapter One: The Arab Electoral and Gender-Equality Gaps

Introduction

The Muslim world has a reputation for being the final frontier of both democracy and women’s emancipation. But recent studies suggest that it may actually be the Arab region\(^1\), not the Muslim world in general, that is especially resistant to the global movements toward democracy and gender equality. While several of these studies attest to the significant need to understand the reasons for these twin ‘Arab gaps,’ none offers a comprehensive explanation for them. Relying on the quantitative and qualitative analyses of other scholars, this paper explores various factors that might explain the lack of democracy and gender equality in the Arab world--factors such as oil wealth; resilient tribal-patriarchal norms; the special cultural centrality of Islam; the anti-imperialist drive for cultural authenticity; and even the impact of one gap upon the other. While these explanations may each carry some weight, this paper argues that none of them is adequate to account for the Arab region’s democracy and gender-equality deficits. It concludes, rather, that these regional deficits are ultimately rooted--to an extent that is difficult to overestimate--in what Fouad Ajami calls ‘the Arab predicament,’ the political and intellectual crisis that engulfed the Arab world after its defeat by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War. Indeed, the culminating claim of this paper is that the searing Israeli defeat cemented in the social and political culture of Arab populations a keen ambition if not to reverse that humiliation, at least to resist the Western dominance it

\(^{1}\) The terms ‘Arab world’ and ‘Arab region’ refer in this paper to the 22 countries and peoples generally thought to be affiliated by use of the Arabic language, cultural and geographical adjacency, and membership in the Arab League. This definition is used by the United Nations Development Programme and numerous other organizations.
An Arab more than a Muslim Democracy Gap

Since mid-2013, there has been a steady editorial drip in Western media pronouncing the failure of the Arab Spring. The current scenes throughout much of the region supply ample reason for pessimism: the atrocities of civil war and extremist violence in Syria and Iraq; the political turnover and apparent resumption of autocracy in Egypt; the divide of public support in Libya, Tunisia, and elsewhere between the supposed ‘one man, one vote, one time’ Islamists and the mawkish relief of old-guard stability. Perhaps this retraction of the hope that lit up advocates of democracy in the West during the early days of the revolutions is due largely to their realization that any anticipation of imminent reform in the Arab Muslim world is naive. But it is likely also due in some degree to a rekindled suspicion that Islam and liberal democracy might be incompatible after all.

Indeed, the original enthusiasm over the Arab Spring was no doubt to some extent an expression of the West’s eagerness to finally put to rest the Orientalist suspicions--still lingering after 9/11 and sustained by the omnipresence of terrorism coverage in the media--that Arab Islamic culture is incompatible with modernization. As one academic put it, “whatever else, the central Orientalist claim posited so dogmatically by Bernard Lewis and his acolytes that the Arab world lacked the capacity to make history relevant to the modern

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2 Orientalism, as conceived by literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said in this context, refers to the Western assumption that ‘Eastern,’ particularly Middle Eastern, cultures are essentially backward, irrational, static, and inferior to the West.
world has been forever refuted [by the uprisings]” (Falk 2013). But the confidence that democracy had finally ripened may have also issued from a general Western conviction that universal liberalism is inevitable, which seemed to be implied even in the protesters’ use of those favorite modern tools of individual expression, Facebook and Twitter. Whatever the explanation for the premature victory laps, democracy advocates have now turned to a question about the region that is woefully familiar: ‘What went wrong?’

One answer is simply that these things take time. Democracy and other institutions that have distinguished the modern era in the West may well turn out to be inevitable and universal, but they are by no means humanity’s natural state. Religious scholar Karen Armstrong describes the “painful process of modernization” in the West: “The period of transition was traumatic and violent. There were acts of genocide, terrible wars of religion, the exploitation of workers in factories, the despoliation of the countryside, and anomie and spiritual malaise in the newly industrialized mega-cities” (2002, 45). Likewise, Olivier Roy reminds his Western readers, “religious tolerance was not the fruit of liberalism and the Enlightenment. Rather it was the product of grudging truces in savage wars of religion, from the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648” (2012, 7). Economist Ismael Hossein-zadeh argues that the Western evolution toward modern economic institutions was much lengthier and more wrenching than the current one in the Muslim world looks to be: “Muslim societies, like less-developed societies elsewhere, are expected, or compelled by the imperatives of the world market, to traverse the nearly four hundred-year journey of the West in a much shorter period of time” (2003). But are Muslim societies like less-developed societies elsewhere? Or are they, as many scholars have suggested, exceptionally resistant or even impervious to modernization?
The political and economic underdevelopment of the Middle East and North Africa is often described by social scientists as a puzzle. According to a World Bank report on the region, “since 1980, the average annual per capita economic growth of the MENA region as a whole has been 0.9 percent, even less than that of Sub-Saharan Africa” (Better Governance for Development 2003, 8). Political economists attribute this dismal growth rate to extraordinarily poor governance. “The MENA region ranks at the bottom in terms of overall governance when compared with countries with similar characteristics in East Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, as well as other developing countries” (10). In their 2009 study of development in the Arab region, James Rauch and Scott Kostyshak observe that while Arab countries have become more democratic in the last several decades, “their gains have been small compared to the waves of democratization that have transformed the polities of non-Arab sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and southern Europe. The Arab reputation for lack of democracy is well-founded” (184). While these juxtapositions are striking, the World Bank’s comparison of the MENA region to Southeast Asia is particularly illuminating. “Studies have shown that if, over the past 15 years, the MENA had matched the quality of administration in the public sector for strong performers in Southeast Asia, the region’s growth rates would have been higher by about one percentage point a year....This would have meant the average income per person would be double what it is today” (Better Governance for Development 2003, 8-9).

Two of those strong Southeast Asian performers, Malaysia and Indonesia, are Muslim-majority democracies, and as such are often touted as proof that Islam and democracy are not mutually exclusive. But perhaps the exceptions prove the rule: they are two of only a handful of Muslim-majority states that the 2012 Freedom House report deemed democratic--in a vast sea of illiberal autocracies and authoritarian-democratic ‘hybrid
regimes’ throughout the Muslim world. Indeed, Rauch and Kostyshak note that the Arab world’s democratic deficit reflects a pattern observed across the broader Muslim world: “Percentage Muslim has been found to be significantly negative in democracy regressions by Barro (1999) and Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson, and Yared (2008). The Arab indicator is statistically insignificant when percentage Muslim is present” (2009, 184). Still, given that Southeast Asia’s largest economy, democratic Indonesia, is also the world’s most populous Muslim nation, it would be difficult to argue that Islam’s categorical incompatibility with democracy is the reason for the Arab Spring’s so-called failure or the MENA’s underdevelopment in general.

While there seems to be a consensus that possessing a larger Muslim population lowers the likelihood that a country is democratic, being Muslim does not necessarily predict a country’s potential for democratization, at least that is the contention of political scientists Alfred Stepan and Graeme Robertson in their paper “An ‘Arab’ More Than a ‘Muslim’ Electoral Gap.” In their 2003 analysis of 47 Muslim-majority nations, they argue that the noteworthy ‘democracy gap’ involving predominantly Muslim countries is not really between those countries and their non-Muslim counterparts but between non-Arab and Arab Muslim-majority countries. Stepan and Robertson base this claim on their study comparing the two groups’ electoral competitiveness—which measures the percentage of a polity’s government officials that have been brought to the most important seats of power by reasonably fair elections. Stepan and Robertson acknowledge that electoral competitiveness is not fully equivalent to democracy, but argue that it is “always a necessary condition for democracy, and thus always a central factor to consider when evaluating prospects for future democratization” (2003, 31).
Their findings are striking: in the 30-year period from the early 1970s when data first became available to the early 2000s when the article was published, “a non-Arab Muslim-majority country was almost 20 times more likely to be ‘electorally competitive’ than an Arab Muslim-majority country” (Stepan and Robertson 2003, 32-33). Not only do non-Arab Muslim states have a far better record on electoral competitiveness than Arab Muslim states, they out-perform even non-Muslim countries on electoral competitiveness in low-income brackets. Indeed, Stepan and Robertson observe that non-Arab Muslim-majority states “form the largest bloc of all those countries that ‘greatly overachieve’ relative to their GDPpc levels when competitive elections are in question” (31). Contrastingly, the 16 Arab states in their study comprise the largest readily identifiable group among all countries that underperform in electoral competitiveness, relative to their GDPpc. Hence, Stepan and Robertson demonstrate that while most Muslim-majority countries are at least moving toward democratization, Arab countries are defying that trend.

In the same year that Stepan and Robertson wrote their article “An ‘Arab’ more than a ‘Muslim’ Electoral Gap,” political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris also published an article contesting the presumed incompatibility of Islam and democracy, but from a very different vantage point. Their analysis provides an entrée to the other major instance of Arab exceptionalism explored in this thesis.

**Demos or Eros?**

In 2003, a decade after the publication of Samuel Huntington’s controversial but pivotal work “The Clash of Civilizations?”, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris wrote an essay arguing that the values separating Western and Muslim societies “have much more to do with eros than demos.” In “The True Clash of Civilizations,” Inglehart and Norris agree with Huntington that culture continues to wield enormous influence over contemporary values
throughout the world, but they are critical of his assumption that the cultural divide between
the West and Islam is over political values: “At this point in history, societies throughout the
world (Muslim and Judeo-Christian alike) see democracy as the best form of government.
Instead, the real fault line between the West and Islam, which Huntington’s theory
completely overlooks, concerns gender equality and sexual liberalization” (2003, 64-65).

Inglehart and Norris draw these conclusions from the most recent World Values
Surveys at that time, those conducted in 1995-6 and 2000-2002, which catalogue the evolving
values and beliefs of the populations of more than 70 countries, 80 percent of the world’s
total population. Muslim countries in the survey displayed stronger support for religious
authorities than did Western societies, though so did many other less secular countries
throughout the world. But most Muslim countries reported favorable attitudes toward
democracy in overwhelming proportions--92 to 99 percent, higher rates than exist even in
the United States. On questions about gender equality, however, a striking divergence of
values between Western and Muslim countries becomes apparent: “on the matter of equal
rights and opportunities for women--measured by such questions as whether men make
better political leaders than women or whether university education is more important for
boys than for girls--Western and Muslim countries score 82 percent and 55 percent,
respectively” (Inglehart and Norris 2003, 67). While Inglehart and Norris acknowledge that
public opinion on these issues does vary within the bloc of Muslim countries surveyed--and
that many former Soviet states ranked as low as most Muslim ones--they emphasize the fact
that Muslim societies on the whole lag behind not only the West but the rest of the world as
well. Furthermore, they point out that this gap in attitudes toward gender equality and sexual
liberalization is widening, as younger generations in Western and other non-Muslim
societies hold progressively more egalitarian views than preceding generations while their
Muslim peers remain nearly as traditional as their elders.

Inglehart and Norris suggest that the Muslim world’s resistance to the global trend
toward valuing gender equality is costly, both economically and politically. As development
agencies and women’s rights advocates often emphasize, keeping women out of the
workforce means sacrificing competitiveness in the global economy and accepting slower
economic development. But the political implications the authors emphasize are less
frequently hailed: “a society’s commitment to gender equality and sexual liberalization
proves time and again to be the most reliable indicator of how strongly that society supports
principles of tolerance and egalitarianism” (Inglehart and Norris 2003, 65). In other words,
they argue, Muslim populations’ negative attitudes toward gender equality, rather than any
political objections, jeopardize their societies’ potential for sustainable democracy.

In his 2002 essay “Islam and Authoritarianism,” political scientist Steven Fish, too,
draws a connection between the lack of democracy and the lack of gender equality in the
Muslim world: “one of Martin Luther King’s favorite sayings was that in order to hold a man
down, one needed to stay down there with him. One might reformulate the adage as, in order
to hold women down, a man needed to stay down there with them--meaning, of course, that
oppression as a habit of life blocks the oppressor’s own advancement and freedom” (2002,
30). Fish arrives at this judgment after empirically testing various aspects of Islam to see
whether any of them somehow makes Muslim-majority societies less prone to
democratization. He distinguishes his findings from previous work with the same conclusion,
noting that while other scholars have drawn the conclusion that the status and treatment of
women in Muslim societies may be politically significant, they have done so based on public
opinion surveys or ethnographic research, not empirical tests. Fish finds that “Muslim
societies are not more prone to political violence; nor are they less ‘secular’ than non-Muslim societies; and interpersonal trust is not necessarily lower in Muslim societies. But one factor does help explain the democratic deficit: the subordination of women” (5).

But given Stepan and Robertson’s work highlighting the particularly poor record for electoral competitiveness in Arab Muslim societies--rather than Muslim societies as a whole--perhaps the conclusions Inglehart and Norris and Fish draw about the Muslim world’s gender gap deserve closer scrutiny, especially if they are right to point out a connection between democratic viability and gender equality. Perhaps Inglehart and Norris’ notion of a ‘sexual clash of civilizations’ between the West and the Muslim world is more a clash between Western and Arab countries than Western and Muslim ones. If so, that clash may help explain, or be explained by, the Arab gap in electoral competitiveness.

The Arab Gap in Gender Equality

Sociologists Helen Rizzo, Abdel-Hamid Adbel-Latif, and Katherine Meyer explore these hypotheses in their 2007 paper “The Relationship Between Gender Equality and Democracy: A Comparison of Arab Versus Non-Arab Muslim Societies”: “Research...which examines social structural and demographic characteristics and points out differences between Arab and non-Arab Muslim societies, suggests the need for a nuanced examination of Muslim societies when seeking explanations for the presence or absence of democratic governance and the role of gender equality and/or religious identity” (1154). Rizzo et al. examine World Values Survey responses on gender equality, democracy, and religious identification to discover whether Inglehart and Norris gloss over differences in public opinion between Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries in their analysis. They note that while
a majority in both groups agreed that men make better political leaders than women, that men are more entitled to jobs than women, and that a wife should obey her husband, the majority in the Arab region was substantially larger than the one in the non-Arab group of countries. Furthermore, they observe that in non-Arab Muslim countries support for democracy and support for gender equality were strongly linked, whereas in Arab countries the support for those two values was divided. “The democrats and those advocating for women’s rights were not the same groups in the Arab world. The majority supported democracy as a system of governance, but it did not extend the idea of democracy to including women’s rights” (1164). Nowhere else in the world does support for democracy predict disfavor of gender equality.

To account for this unique and puzzling pair of values, Rizzo et al. take a closer look at this group’s other characteristics. They note that these Arab Muslim democrats who disfavored gender equality were religiously observant and feared the invasive influence of Western culture: “it seems that respondents who wanted to halt gender equality and protection of individual liberties thought that democracy could achieve these creeping processes. Groups opposed to the cultural spread of feminist ideas, which include some Islamists, could see democracy as a way of gaining power that would enable them to stop the perceived threat of changing norms regarding gender, by implementing their interpretations of shar’ia” (Rizzo et al. 2007, 1165). On the other hand, Rizzo et al. suppose that supporters of gender equality may prefer the status quo of secular authoritarianism to the political leadership of religiously conservative groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, who might very well move to limit personal freedoms and women’s rights upon coming to power in democratic elections. So in essence, they hypothesize that Islamists pretend to be democrats
in hopes of gaining power and enacting *Shari’ah*, while feminists and other liberals swallow their democratic ideals and support secular autocracies to keep Islamists and their interpretations of *Shari’ah* out of power. Meanwhile, the autocrats reap the reward of this political jockeying, keeping secular feminists, ethnic and religious minorities, and liberals in their camp by stoking fears about Islamists’ true undemocratic intentions.

Understood this way, it almost seems that the Arab world’s lagging progress toward gender equality is no more than an incidental byproduct of the power play between authoritarian regimes and their Islamist opposition. But judging by the World Values Surveys that the studies of both Rizzo et al. and Inglehart and Norris use in their respective analyses, the popular support for Islamists and their conservative stance on women’s place in society does not seem strictly strategic in the way secular feminists’ and liberals’ support for authoritarian regimes is. So why does the Arab region trail the rest of the world in progress toward gender equality? Is it merely a cause inadvertently lost in the political struggle between secular autocrats and their Islamist opponents, or is there a more deliberate rejection of it in Arab societies? To answer these questions, it is necessary to first take a closer look at the facts about women’s rights and roles in the Arab societies.

Women in the Arab region on average face more discrimination economically, politically, and socially than women in every other region in the world, a fact established by numerous studies from the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, and other organizations. Even compared to poorer, less industrialized regions, Arab women live with greater gender inequality and disempowerment. They have the lowest rates of participation in the workforce worldwide, half that of the global average. And while the degree varies from country to country, Arab women are starkly underrepresented in

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3 The Islamic legal system, derived from the sacred texts of the Quran and Hadith, constituting the religious duties of Muslims as individual believers and as a society.
governance and other decision-making roles. The legal codes of most Arab states relegate women to dependent status in matters such as divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Furthermore, sexual harassment and domestic violence against women in the region are exceptionally common and not reliably prosecuted.

Though much progress toward gender equality has been made in health, education, penal codes, and other dimensions over the last few decades, women in Arab countries still endure above-average deprivation in key human development indices—health, knowledge, and income. Since the U.N. made its Millennium Development Goals in 1990, women’s overall and maternal health, as well as access to medical care, have made impressive strides. However, according to the U.N.’s most recent Arab Human Development Report on gender and development, “women lose a larger number of years to disease, and this appears to be unconnected to standards of living, risk factors, and deaths linked to pregnancy or childbirth, indicating that this relatively greater loss is attributable to general life styles that discriminate against women” (Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World 2006, 7). In Egypt, maternal mortality rates have been reduced by two thirds; in Yemen, they have been reduced by over 40% (Global Health Observatory Data Repository 2014). Still, women in the Arab region, most of all in the poorest countries, suffer high mortality rates as a result of poor maternal health care.

Like women’s access to healthcare, girls’ and women’s access to education has also improved significantly. The ratio of girls to boys has dramatically increased at all levels of education in most Arab countries over the last 25 years, and there are actually more female university graduates than male ones in several countries. Women have even demonstrated higher rates of academic achievement than men. Despite these gains, women still suffer from more limited access to educational opportunities than men. “In terms of basic indicators, the
Arab region has one of the highest rates of female illiteracy (as much as one half, compared to only one third among males). It also displays one of the lowest rates of enrolment at the various levels of education” (Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World 2006, 7). Another serious problem with education for Arab women is that they tend to graduate from the fields that are least likely to lead to employment, namely the humanities and the social sciences. This trend has changed somewhat in the last few years, with some countries even reporting that women are graduating with degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at twice the rate of men (Durrani 2015). The increased percentage of Arab women with STEM degrees is largely due to the recent openings of several coeducational universities in the Gulf designed specifically to improve the region’s competitiveness in science and technology. Because these universities make it a point to offer women’s classes at different times from men’s classes, more women are able to undertake STEM courses of study than had previously been permitted in sex-segregated Arab societies (U.S. News and World Report 2014). And some universities have even opened separate campuses and online programs for women. While Arab universities’ greater accommodation of women to high-demand fields does help empower them in important ways, it also sets a standard of sex-segregation that employers does not match. Thus, even many accomplished female STEM graduates do not go on to work in their fields.

“Education and basic health care have come to be considered as universal rights. In contrast, participation in the labor force—looking for work and being employed—remains very much influenced by preferences and opportunities. Worldwide, only 50 percent of women participate in the labor force, although there is a wide variation across Regions: from 25 percent in MENA to 65 percent in low-income countries (LICs)” (Opening Doors 2013, 10). Development agencies emphasize gender equality not only as an end in itself but also as
indispensable to development. These agencies have made education a central tenet of their efforts to foster gender equality and overall development, only to discover that increases in education are not dependably translating to increases in women’s economic and political participation. Indeed, participation in the labor force is where progress in Arab women’s rights hits a wall; even with the highest rates of increase in women’s share of economic activity worldwide, Arab women still have the lowest rate of economic participation of all regions.

Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and the Republic of Yemen all have labor restrictions on work that may be ‘morally harmful’ or could affect women’s social standing. The ultimate effect of all these types of restrictions can be to prevent women from participating in substantial sectors of the economy” (Opening Doors 2013, 16). Even when women do work, they are paid and promoted less than their male counterparts—despite legal guarantees against gender discrimination in the workplace. In several Arab states, women are required to obtain the permission of a male relative to work, drive, or take a loan. In addition to empowering them in society and at home, women’s participation in the workforce would spell higher economic output and a stronger position in the global economy for the Arab region. “The failure to use human capital, especially highly educated women, curbs economic development and squanders important energies and investments, which might otherwise contribute to greater economic development for all” (Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World 2006, 9).

Without substantial economic participation, women cannot hope to expand their political participation and leadership. While almost every Arab state now guarantees women’s suffrage, ‘guardianship laws’ that limit women’s mobility and higher rates political illiteracy among women often have the effect of limiting political participation. “To be truly
equal, women must have the opportunity to participate fully in public affairs, and have equal rights in the society and in the home....While most countries in the [MENA] Region guarantee constitutional equality for women and men, MENA’s rates of female representation in parliaments are among the lowest in the world” (*Opening Doors* 2013, 13). Even the modest gains in women’s political leadership apparently wrought by the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 have brought little genuine progress. For example, in Tunisia--one of the region’s most liberal countries--the percentage of female parliament members doubled after the 2011 elections; but this was largely due to the fact that most of those women were nominated by the illiberal Islamist al-Nahda party in its strategy to win more seats by exploiting an electoral law that requires half of parties’ candidates to be women. Many of these new female members were the wives of veteran al-Nahda members of parliament. Furthermore, “only 46 percent of Egyptians and 54 percent of Jordanians said women had the right to assume the position of a government minister, and only 47 percent of Egyptians and 55 percent of Jordanians thought women should have the right to be judges” (*Telhami* 2013, 164). Despite superficial or symbolic improvements, discrimination against women in the political sphere remains a firm fact of life in the Arab world. And without a political voice, women cannot help change restrictions on their rights in other spheres.
Chapter Two: Potential Explanations for the Twin Arab Gaps

“Complexities in Arab Muslim majority countries over women’s rights and democracy abound and, in fact, may dwarf the importance of divisions between the West and Muslim populations...” (Rizzo et al. 2007, 1165). The notion of an ‘Arab exceptionalism’ is not novel or uncontroversial, but it seems to also not be misguided. In view of the research demonstrating pronounced Arab deficits in both competitive elections and gender equality, one can only wonder if there may be some factor that accounts for both. This chapter will explore various possible explanations for these ‘twin Arab gaps’ in the aim of revealing what that factor is not and of inspiring greater confidence in this thesis’ claim as to what it must ultimately be.

Oil Wealth

One question that many scholars have explored in seeking to account for lower rates of both democracy and gender equality in Muslim and Arab societies is whether their oil wealth is somehow a factor in both. Michael Ross, a political scientist who has worked for years to conclusively answer this question, argues that while oil wealth in no way threatens the survival of established democracies, it does hinder the process of democratization in significant ways: “I find evidence that oil wealth strongly inhibits democratic transitions in authoritarian states, that this pattern is reasonably robust, and that regardless of any possible countervailing pro-democracy effects, oil’s net impact on democratic transitions is strongly negative” (2009, 2). He notes that Islam seems to explain the high occurrence of authoritarian rule in Muslim countries only until oil wealth is factored in--then the variable
of Islam becomes statistically insignificant. While Ross attests that his analysis establishes oil as an impediment to democratization, he admits it does not empirically account for why or how it is so, a query about which he looks forward to the findings of future studies.

Remembering the lesson of Stepan and Robertson--that the apparent ‘Muslim gap’ in electoral competitiveness is actually a deficit more peculiar to the Arab region--might Ross’s attribution of the Muslim democracy deficit to the oil curse also overlook an Arab sub-gap? Rauch and Kostyshak seek to settle this question in their 2009 study “The Three Arab Worlds,” which for the sake of comparison divides the diverse Arab region into the fuel-endowed, the sub-Saharan, and the remaining ‘Mediterranean’ countries. By comparing measures of democracy in each of these Arab sub-regions and in non-Arab regions with and without oil but at a similar stage of development, Rauch and Kostyshak find that all three Arab regions lag behind their non-Arab counterparts, whether or not they are fuel-endowed. Yet their study indicates, as previously noted, that this pattern is not unique to Arab societies but is evident across the Muslim world--the very premise Ross’s work suggests is erroneous. Moreover, the conflicting conclusions of these studies represent a larger, long-running debate. Suffice it to say, then, that evidence that conclusively determines the reason for the Muslim world’s overall lack of democracy has yet to emerge. Furthermore, the Arab gap in electoral competitiveness has yet to be explained.

As to whether oil is to blame for the persistence of gender discrimination in Muslim societies, Ross’s analysis again leads him to a decisive answer: “women in the Middle East are underrepresented in the workforce and in government because of oil--not Islam” (2008, 1). In “Oil, Islam, and Women,” he argues that the nature of the oil industry, meaning its demand for workers with greater physical strength, discourages female labor force participation. Ross also contends that because oil production is lucrative, it comes to dominate a country’s
economy, squeezing out industries in which women could work as well as men, such as manufacturing and agriculture. Then, because of their reduced access to economic power, women’s potential for political and social influence diminishes. Ross considers measures of oil wealth and gender equality within the Muslim world and observes that the states with the greatest oil wealth--Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman--also have the worst records on gender equality. Conversely, he points out that the states that were first to grant women’s suffrage and have the highest female economic and political participation--Djibouti, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia--are ones with little or no oil. “In short,” Ross asserts, “petroleum perpetuates patriarchy” (14).

In “Mecca or Oil? Why Arab states lag in gender equality,” Pippa Norris (co-author with Ronald Inglehart of the 2003 article “The True Clash of Civilizations” discussed in the previous chapter) addresses Ross’s argument, including his direct critique of her and Inglehart’s claim that a ‘sexual clash of civilizations’ divides the West and the Muslim world. Curiously, Norris introduces her rebuttal to Ross by pointing out that despite the great gains in educational and occupational attainment made by women in advanced industrial societies, countries like the United States and Japan trail the world average in the percentage of female elected officials. “By contrast, far more women are members of parliament in some poorer developing societies and emerging economies, notably the well-known cases of Rwanda (ranked Number 1) and Cuba (4th), South Africa (3rd), and Mozambique (10th)” (Norris 2011, 4). She highlights this seeming idiosyncrasy to illustrate the point that societies relying on gradual social change, as opposed to mandatory quotas, for progress toward gender equality have often seen meager results, at least as far as political leadership is concerned. She supposes that the removal of structural barriers, such as formal sex discrimination by educational institutions and employers, has failed to yield gender equality in American and
Japanese political leadership because structural barriers are only half of the problem. Cultural barriers comprise the other half.

It is on this premise which Norris mounts her challenge to Ross’s theory that oil impedes gender equality by reducing the number of women in the labor force. To account for his overvaluing of structural factors, she highlights flaws in Ross’s research design, noting his problematic case selection, negligence of certain controls, and omitted analysis of the theory he seeks to discredit, namely that Islamic culture has hindered gender equality. She points out, for example, that if Ross had incorporated developing economies dependent on natural resources besides oil in his study, his thesis would have been considerably weakened. Is there any reason to think that the production of other resources somehow requires less strenuous manual labor than does oil, and so is more conducive to female workers? “Since the extraction and distribution of natural commodities forms a critical part of the economy in many diverse regions of the world, a measure which reflected a more comprehensive basket of resources would...help to disentangle the complex effects of Muslim religious faith and oil” (Norris 2011, 9). But Norris primarily addresses Ross’s thesis by empirically testing Islam’s influence on attitudes about the treatment and status of women, the theory he attempts to debunk without directly analyzing. In so doing, she concludes that Arab gender inequality is about ‘Mecca,’ not oil: “overall the models indicate that the predominant or diffuse religious traditions in Muslim societies, Muslim identities, and the strength of religiosity, provide strong predictors of traditional attitudes towards gender roles....By contrast, there appears to be no support for the thesis that oil-dependent economies are associated directly with more traditional cultural attitudes towards women and sexual morality” (16).

Rauch and Kostyshak’s analysis of Arab political, economic, and social development also explores the matter of women’s empowerment and gender equality. And on the question
of oil’s impact on female labor force participation, their findings corroborate Norris’s. While noting that their three Arab sub-regions—fuel-endowed, sub-Saharan, and Mediterranean—have all made strides toward better health and educational opportunities for women—some quite impressive—they still observe a striking trend: “We see that at present the Arab gender gaps exceed those in the comparison country groups across the board, and by extraordinarily large margins. Latin America, southern Europe, and the non-Arab fuel economies all reduced their labor force participation gender gaps since 1980 far more than any of the Arab worlds. Arab convergence in the near future seems unlikely” (Rauch and Kostyshak 2009, 182). And even more noteworthy, Rauch and Kostyshak demonstrate that on the issue of women’s participation in the workforce, the Arab region stands out from the larger Muslim world. This finding contradicts their hypothesis—and Norris’ assumption—that the substantial Arab gender gap in labor force participation rates could be explained by simple reference to traditional social norms common across Muslim societies. As Rauch and Kostyshak incredulously attest, “we add an indicator for Arab countries, and percentage Muslim becomes insignificant—the Arab effect explains the Islam effect, rather than the other way around! This result is robust to inclusion of many variables thought to influence female labor force participation, including per capita GDP, various measures of women’s education, and fertility” (182). Not only does fuel endowment fail to explain Arab countries’ outstanding resistance to gender reform, even Islam does not account for it.

**Resilient Tribal-patriarchal Tradition**

Another common—though not uncontroversial—explanation for the twin Arab gaps blames the persistence of tribal-patriarchal norms in contemporary Arab societies. In pre-Islamic times, Arab populations were organized into tribes based on kinship; loyalty to one’s clan and adherence to its patriarchal hierarchy were of paramount importance. When
Islam came to prominence, it sought to reorder this social framework by creating a collective identity and solidarity within the *ummah*, or Muslim community, rather than within the tribe. However, “the Arab tribes, primarily the Bedouin but also the urban-rural tribes, preserved their authoritarian structures unchanged” (*Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* 2006, 15-16). A second major challenge has come to the tribal-patriarchal order with industrialization, the rise of the modern state, and the spread of democracy; but according to some scholars, this one, too, has been to some degree rebuffed. Indeed, some scholars have attributed the lack of Arab democracies to the region’s resilient patriarchal tradition. Notions about the ‘Arab personality’ or cultural bent--that Arabs only respect strong leadership or that they have a penchant for benevolent despots--have helped spin essentialist and exceptionalist myths into explanations of the Arab democracy deficit--but is there a grain of truth to be found in them? Could persistent tribal-patriarchal norms somehow make contemporary Arab societies particularly inhospitable to democracy, or at least account for the gap in electoral competitiveness observed by Stepan and Robertson?

This is the general contention of Hisham Sharabi in his much-discussed 1988 work *Neopatriarchy*: “over the last one hundred years the patriarchal structures of Arab society, far from being displaced or truly modernized, have only be strengthened and maintained in ‘deformed,’ modernized forms” (4). Neopatriarchy, as Sharabi would have it, is the perpetuation of traditional patriarchal authority, values, and social relations under the guise of the modern state. Ali Zai’ur also draws parallels between tribal patriarchy and the authoritarian state in the Arab world. In Zai’ur’s conception, the contemporary Arab autocrat presents himself as “the big patriarch and head of the large family and addresses his folk with words such as my dear people, my dear children” (qtd in Ayubi 1996, 166). Nazih Ayubi elaborates on Sharabi’s and Zai’ur’s analyses: “this style fits well with the pattern of
hierarchical and authoritarian family upbringing: the modern relationship of the citizen to the state is similar to the child’s traditional relationship with the father: he punishes but one can expect him to provide everything” (1996, 166). Because of these certain tribal proclivities in the ‘Arab personality,’ the theory goes, Arab political culture has leaned toward authoritarianism and away from pluralism, competition, and civil institutions.

While it would likely be difficult in any case to conclusively determine whether Arab societies have always been more deeply patriarchal than other societies, a recent study has presented a quantitative measure of tribalism that may suggest whether contemporary Arab societies could be more patriarchal because they are, and perhaps have always been, more tribal. David Jacobson and Natalie Deckard, the authors of this 2012 study on tribalism, recognize the controversial but potentially illuminating nature of such an endeavor: “The concept of tribalism is fraught with imperialist and culturally relativist connotations. Any attempt to characterize the quality or, as we do, the quantity of tribalism in a society must acknowledge that background, but although we understand the limitations of the term ‘tribalism,’ we argue that the concept is nonetheless a social and political reality” (2). The focus of their paper is the connection between militant Islam and tribalism, but the “Tribalism Index” they develop to explore this connection is useful for determining whether the Arab region is particularly tribal. Jacobson and Deckard assess a society’s level of tribalism by measuring several components: the degree of gender equality; the levels of state corruption, communal sense of grievance, and ethnolinguistic fractionalization; and the percentage of indigenous people.

Perhaps the most noticeable pattern in their results is the high concentration of tribalism in Muslim-majority countries: of the 152 countries surveyed, the top ten percent in ranking all have Muslim majorities. Yet the fact that over half of the world’s most tribal
societies are Arab seems to bode well for the theory that Arab tribal-patriarchal culture explains the region’s lack of democracy, or at least its lack of electoral competitiveness. However, because the highest-ranking countries in the Tribalism Index are Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran--three non-Arab Muslim countries with a total population of about three-fourths of the total Arab population--Jacobson and Deckard’s study provides no clear support for this theory. In fact, in Stepan and Robertson’s study on electoral competitiveness, none of these most tribal, non-Arab societies falls under the ‘electoral underachiever’ category to which seven Arab states belong. Indeed, Pakistan is even among the electoral overachievers for the nearly 30-year period surveyed. Thus, the Arab gap in electoral competitiveness remains a riddle.

Besides being a convenient narrative to explain everything from the legendary popularity of father-like former Egyptian president Gamal Nasser to the supposed failure of the Arab Spring, some scholars have maintained that the Arab world’s deep patriarchal traditions account for the region’s sustained legacy of gender inequality. The 2006 Arab Human Development Report, which focuses on women’s empowerment, attests to the resilience of not just gender inequality but patriarchy in the Arab world: “Relations within the family have continued to be governed by the father’s authority over his children and the husband’s over his wife, under the sway of the patriarchal order. Changes to which this authoritarian family framework has since been subjected cannot be considered far-reaching....Male control at the economic, social, cultural, legal and political levels remains the abiding legacy of patriarchy” (Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World 16). The report echoes the common assertion that this legacy derives from pre-Islamic ‘Arab tribal culture’--which vigorously guarded a woman’s chastity as “a matter touching the very heart of her kinfolk’s security and standing” (15).
But referencing their heritage of tribalism does not account for why contemporary Arab societies have retained patriarchal norms to an extent other societies have not. Most societies around the world derive from deeply patriarchal cultures, yet according to the numerous surveys and studies reviewed in this paper, every region of the world has made more progress against their own legacies of gender discrimination than has the Arab world. Were traditional Arab tribal cultures more robustly patriarchal than other cultures and thus have farther to go to egalitarianism? Noting again the Tribalism Index compiled by Jacobson and Deckard—which becomes especially pertinent to this question because the measure of gender inequality is its most heavily weighted component—it is clear that while Arab countries are among the most tribal societies in the world, they do not stand out as exceptionally tribal among other Muslim countries. Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran are all more tribal than any Arab state. Tribal-patriarchal culture has no doubt contributed to the Arab world’s lagging progress toward gender equality, but it does not explain this incident of Arab exceptionalism.

The Special Cultural Centrality of Islam

While it is a major premise of this paper and of the work of several scholars considered herein that having a Muslim majority alone does not account for the Arab region’s gaps in electoral competitiveness and gender equality, perhaps there is some special Arab attachment to Islam as a native ideology that somehow contributes to the twin gaps. Are Arab Muslims more religious? Or could it be that Islam is somehow more central or fundamental to Arab culture? Inglehart and Norris’ 2003 essay “The True Clash of Civilizations,” which contrasts Western values survey results with those from the Muslim world, does not consider discrepancies of religiosity or conservatism within the Muslim world but rather takes Muslim-majority states as a single bloc. However, Rizzo et al., who examine
the same values surveys in their 2007 paper “The Relationship between Gender Equality and
Democracy: A Comparison of Arab Versus Non-Arab Muslim Societies,” discover significant
differences between Arab and non-Arab Muslim-majority populations’ survey answers: “the
clashes between groups within Muslim societies...are significant and not captured by general
theory addressing the place of gender in conflict between Islam and the West” (1165). They
note that although a slightly lower percentage of Arab Muslims identified as religious than
did non-Arab Muslims--85.4% versus 89.3%--a much higher percentage of Arabs than
non-Arabs considered their religious identity to be more important than their national
identity: 73% versus 46.3%. They also take stock of the fact that Arab Muslim populations
trusted the judgment of religious authorities in social matters nearly 20% more than their
non-Arab peers.

So have Rizzo et al. illuminated the reason for Arab societies’ departure from the rest
of the Muslim bloc in the measure of electoral competitiveness or of gender equality? Could
one or both of the twin gaps derive somehow from Arabs identifying more closely with
Islamic tradition--perhaps leading to closer religious observance or more conservative
interpretations of Islam’s social and political prescriptions? There does not seem to be a
direct logic to such an argument with regard to electoral competitiveness, as the values
surveys Rizzo et al. use show over 15% higher support for democracy in Arab than in
non-Arab Muslim countries. If Arab political culture reflected these constituencies’ values,
there would be more not less democracy--and electoral competitiveness--in the Arab world
than in the rest of the Muslim bloc.

A straightforward and persuasive case might more readily be made that the Arab
gender-equality gap results from Islam’s deeper entrenchment in its native Arab culture than
in the non-Arab cultures which adopted it. This is political analyst Nadia Hijab’s reasoning in
her explanation of why Turkey, the seat of the Islamic caliphate for 400 years, secularized and abolished its personal status codes while Arab states did not: “The Islamic religion is intricately tied up with the history and culture of the Arabs, more so than is the case with the Ottoman Turks. The Quran was revealed in the Arabian peninsula and in Arabic. Islam is part of the Arab identity, both national and personal: Christian Arabs are often as attracted to Islam, as part of their culture and identity, as are Muslim Arabs” (1988, 21). But the argument suggesting that Arab societies have been slower than other Muslim societies to relinquish traditional gender norms because of their greater attachment or adherence to Islamic tradition encounters a formidable obstacle: historical fact.

Conservatism has hardly been a constant in Arab Muslim culture over the last century--at least if Islamic practices like public gender segregation and women wearing the hijab are any indication. On the contrary, social and legal norms regarding women’s role, behavior, and dress have been at the center of dramatic cultural shifts over the course of the twentieth century. Despite the common Western perception of Arab women as acquiescent victims of oppression, Arab women’s rights movements boast long, rich histories similar to those in the West. Starting in the late 19th century, Arab feminists began producing literature and founding organizations that called for women’s integration into the public sphere. Their efforts were bolstered by the wave of secular nationalism that first swept the region during its fight against European imperialism and then ushered in the modern bureaucracy of the nation-state. The secular nationalist movement was emblematized in the figure of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose legendary political charisma and conviction galvanized Arab publics across the greater Middle East and mobilized the regional

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4 Shari’ah-based legal codes restricting women’s rights in marriage, divorce, and other family matters.
5 The veil worn by many Muslim women to connote modesty, honor, and seclusion from men in the public sphere.
shift from an identification with Islam--and its entailed sociopolitical directives--to one in which Arab ethnicity and heritage were articulated in a progressive, modern state.

Nasserist post-colonial governments throughout the Arab world pursued ambitious reforms for girls’ education and women’s health care, aiming to reduce female illiteracy, maternal mortality, and other problems women faced. In Egypt, a political and cultural leader in the region, “the government actively promoted, in education, salaries, and other ways, the concept of women’s equality and their right to work. Women received the vote in the constitution of 1956. By 1962 women had been appointed to senior government positions, and all the women holding such positions were bareheaded--like the majority of women in mainstream society” (Ahmed 2011, 64). It became increasingly uncontroversial for Arab women to break with traditional norms of seclusion and suppression by wearing ‘modern’ dress, attending university, and working outside the home. As Leila Ahmed elucidates in her 2011 work *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*, the most visible mark of this liberalizing trend was the vanishing custom of *hijab*: “During the Nasser era much of the Arab world...marched inexorably forward into the Age of No Veiling--an age that was to reach its peak in the late sixties and would persist into the seventies and even on into the early nineties. Although already widespread in the cities by the forties, being unveiled increasingly became the norm during the Nasser era, spreading even to [what Middle East historian Albert Hourani called the] ‘conservative lower classes’ and also into the countryside” (63-64). Perhaps to allay the incredulity of her Western reader that the Arab world could have been so liberal decades ago, Ahmed sprinkles her historical account with mentions of the popularity of miniskirts, false eyelashes, and ‘western-style hair.’
The event that curbed this progressive trend starting in the late 1960s was the rise of Islamist sociopolitical groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, first in Egypt and then throughout the Arab world. Though the Brotherhood and other Islamist groups had operated for decades, they suddenly soared in popularity, particularly among young people. “Initially, and through the 1970s, these developments took everyone by surprise--it was a turn of events that no historian or student of society had predicted” (Ahmed 2011, 78). These groups aimed to realize the ideal Islamic society, according to the standard of the early Islamic community described in the Quran and Sunna, and were known for promoting strict and sometimes radical interpretations of Islam. As Ahmed attests, there was agreement within the Islamist movement on women’s right to education and work outside the home; “indisputably, though, the consensus was that the Islamist foundational ideal was of women as members of families headed by men, devoting their primary energies to nurturing and educating children” (138).

The young women who joined Islamist organizations, often after meeting recruiters on university campuses, “[took] on not only head covering but also Islamic dress, and they [began] to scrupulously follow the specific ‘ritual, behavioral and verbal prescriptions’ required by the movement. Among the most important of these behavioral prescriptions was a strict adherence to the foundational taboo against the mixing of the sexes--a taboo of course signaled by the hijab and Islamic dress” (Ahmed 2011, 79). By the 1980s, Islamic dress was becoming less the distinguishing fad of the Islamist youth movement and more a feature of mainstream society. “Whereas in the seventies it had been veiled women who had been seen as different and who might find themselves...the targets of hostility, by the late eighties it was unveiled women who could find themselves in this situation” (126).

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6 The collection of the Prophet Muhammad’s reported sayings and practices.
In light of these profound shifts in the Arab world over the last century--first toward women’s individual agency and integration into public life and then toward the traditional Islamic ideal of women as secluded and devoted to domestic roles--it becomes impossible to contend that the Arab gender gap stems from any particularly deep and abiding commitment to Islamic tradition. But surveying the radical transformation of Arab society by the resurgence of Islam does raise another possible explanation for the twin Arab gaps.

**The Anti-Imperialist Drive for Cultural Authenticity**

Many scholars propose that it was an anti-imperialist drive for cultural authenticity that propelled the spectacular revival of Islam since the 1960s, a movement with which they associate a rejection of ‘Western’ political forms and gender-egalitarian norms in favor of a *Shari’ah*-based Islamic society. After all, “several [Arab] countries had just emerged or were in the process of emerging from British or French domination. The French army had just left Syria in 1946, and France declared Algeria independent in 1962. Iraq...remained under British control through a series of coups and uprisings until--and indeed beyond--the army coup of 1958....Egypt’s monarchy and its government, viewed as both corrupt and unable to free themselves of the shackles of British control, had been overthrown in the Revolution of 1952” (Ahmed 2011, 59). The 2007 values survey analysis of Rizzo et al. corroborates this theory on one point: “we found that those who were religious and feared Western cultural invasion were against gender equality” (1165). But the surveys demonstrate that, though it might have once been, the other claim of this theory is no longer valid: “those who were more religious supported democracy” (1165). From this conclusion, it would seem that the desire to reject Western ways and return to one’s cultural heritage can at most account for only the Arab gap in gender equality, not the region’s deficit of that fixture of democracy, electoral competitiveness. But although the Arab electoral gap cannot be traced to the
Islamic resurgence, it may still be the fruit of an anti-imperialist drive for cultural authenticity. Before the merits of this idea can be assessed, the phenomenon of this desire for authenticity in Arab culture must be first be explored.

In his seminal work *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*, historian Albert Hourani delves into the critical years during which Arab political and intellectual life veered from its preoccupation with “internal decline, how to explain it and how to arrest it” to confront a new threat, European domination (1962, 103). The 1881 conquest of Tunisia by France and the occupation of Egypt by the British the following year “pointed the moral,” as Hourani puts it, of the threat from the West. Writing in this *fin-de-siècle* sentiment, Islamic reformer Rashid Rida recognized danger to the Arab and Muslim worlds in the “ideological, intellectual, political, Communist, and Bolshevik upheavals” and decried the inundation of Western heresy, moral degradation, language, and customs (qtd. in Kurzman 2002, 78).

Rida’s concern was not just about Arab and Muslim societies’ cultural invasion and subjugation by European imperialists, however; he was disturbed by what he saw as their tendency to imitate the West: “in our attempts to acquire the novel and borrow the modern we have only clung to the fringes and have never been able to reproduce it fully….the shell of imitation...is useless in itself” (qtd. on 78).

The Muslim Brotherhood’s leading intellectual, Sayyid Qutb, shared Rida’s revulsion at Western influence in his native Egypt and in the broader Arab and Muslim worlds. Because he spent two years studying in the United States, his concept of the West and of its pollution of the *ummah* seem to have been largely shaped by his experience of American society. Muslims in America “were the people Qutb criticized for reverting back to such ignorance: crass materialism, unbridled capitalism, sexual animalism, vulgar feminism, public ‘emancipation,’ licentiousness, and uninhibited freedom. These were the aspects of Western
life that he objected to, and to which many expatriate Arabs and Muslims had long since
sufficed” (Toth 2013, 66-67). Qutb called this waywardness *jahiliyya*—religious ignorance
and indifference—a term he appropriated from its original application describing pre-Islamic
Arabia. He might never have developed his vision of reform had he not come to recognize the
same spirit of *jahiliyya* at home in Egypt as in the *ummah* abroad. Surveying the effects of
“continued British and French hegemony and secular, Westernizing Muslims” in Arab
society, Qutb concluded that the Arab region and the wider Muslim world were on the brink
of destruction (69).

“During the age of Islamic decline and European ascendancy, the twin issues of
internal decline and external defense engaged Arab intellectuals and men of public affairs
and divided their ranks” (Ajami 1981, 51). While Islamic intellectuals like Rida and Qutb
envisioned religious reform as the solution, others saw regional solidarity, national
independence, and modern, secular statehood as the critical prerequisites of their societies’
rehabilitation. Egypt President Gamal Nasser in particular came to stand for “unity among
Arab peoples, pride in self, an end to colonial influence, independence” (qtd. in Ahmed 2011,
58). Secular nationalist movements developed on the political right and left throughout the
Arab world. For their part, the liberal nationalists neglected to develop an agenda of social
reform and economic justice, and thus never succeeded in building wide constituencies
among Arab publics looking for solutions to economic hardship and inequality. Meanwhile,
“there was broad popular support for the Arab world’s revolutionary leaders, most
prominently for Gamal Abdul Nasser...despite their indifference or even hostility to political
movements advocating greater respect for Islamic prescriptions in the formulation of public
policy” (Tessler 1997, 108). Unlike their liberal counterparts, they “insisted that nationalism
without social improvement was reactionary and insensitive…and pledged their allegiance to a brand of nationalism that incorporated radical reform and socialism” (Ajami 1981, 174).

These socialist regimes were wildly popular, even being authoritarian. “The sorts of regimes that today predominate in the Arab world,” asserts sociologist and Syrian opposition leader Burhan Ghalioun, “have nothing in common with the populist or nationalist regimes that inaugurated the post-independence era. Despite their authoritarian character, those populist regimes achieved grand transformations upon the path of democratization and modernization. By eliminating the remnants of feudalism and aristocratic parasitism, by distributing land to peasants, by founding national state structures and administrative services, and by pushing economic modernization, they succeeded in gaining the trust and support of large sectors of the population, which saw in such regimes the stuff of emancipation and liberation. Their authoritarianism was almost hidden by their popularity” (2004). However, these Arab regimes did not maintain their commitments to democratization and economic modernization; yet in the absence of political and economic inclusivity, they did maintain their power. If strong authoritarian leadership had been the key to the Arab world’s successful bid for independence and quest for cultural authenticity, it now became the lock shutting the region to democracy. Should the fervent drive in Arab culture for authenticity then be blamed for predisposing the region to strong rulers who “never committed themselves to a necessary (though as all democrats know, not sufficient) condition for democracy—contested elections for the highest offices of state power” (Stepan and Roberts 2004)? In other words, could this desire for self-determination in the face of Western cultural and political domination be the ultimate source of the Arab electoral gap?

According to the findings of Marcus Noland and Howard Pack in their 2007 book *The Arab Economies in a Changing World*, this hypothesis cannot explain the Arab region’s
exceptional lack of electoral competitiveness. If anything, being the victim of imperialism increases a country’s conduciveness to democracy, a phenomenon that even non-Arab Muslim countries are not beyond: “There is evidence that political choices of the Arab governments are indeed distinct and non-supportive of democracy, relative to either other former British colonies or other Muslim-majority countries. Among the 19 Muslim-majority former British colonies, the 8 non-Arab countries all joined the Commonwealth while none of the 9 Arab countries did (Stepan and Roberts 2004). This is particularly intriguing in light of former British colonial status being among the most robust correlates with democracy” (Noland and Pack 2007, 287). Once again, the Arab region stands out starkly and inexplicably from its peers.

But more damning to this theory—for both the gender and electoral gaps—is the simple fact that the Arab world has shared an anti-imperialist drive for cultural authenticity with societies around the world, as they, too, have sought to come out from the West’s shadow and confront the challenge of modernity on their own terms. Ali Shariati, the intellectual champion of the Iranian Revolution, lamented that “in the face of colonialism, people have become monkey-like. [They] deny their own cultural tradition by displaying ‘exuberant imitation’ and ‘assimilation’” (1986, 61). He called for Iranian society to instead pursue cultural authenticity “so that the wandering generation which is alienated from itself and which is separated from all its spiritual and cultural roots...may return to itself, to its cultural heritage, to its historical and moral self, and to ‘self-awareness’”(47).

Even Chinese nationalist Sun Yat-Sen, who promoted emulation of some Western institutions, was still “concerned that westernization might undermine social cohesion” and feared that if China mimicked the West’s liberalism, it would result in “too much liberty without any unity” (Schell and Delury 2013, 127). Indian nationalist Mahatma Gandhi was
much less hesitant in his repudiation of Western ways: “Western civilization is the creation of Satan” (qtd. in Misra 2008, 157); Indians should turn from westernization to the “true ‘traditions’ of real India” (157). Indeed, as Maria Misra writes in Vishnu’s Crowded Temple: India Since the Great Rebellion, “the uncomfortable proximity of modernization to westernization [has been] a vexed and treacherous issue for all third-world nationalists” (168). As such, it can hardly account the Arab world’s exceptional slowness in adopting modern ideals of electoral competition and gender equality from the West.

But altogether dismissing the anti-imperialist current in Arab culture as the potential source of the twin gaps would be a premature conclusion, for there is one extraordinary dimension to it: the Arab-Israeli conflict.
Chapter Three: The Ultimate Cause of the Twin Arab Gaps

The Arab-Israeli Conflict after 1967

“A head-on collision between two national movements; a clash between Western and Oriental cultures; disputes of territories, borders, maritime rights, property and refugees; intense mutual suspicion engendered by a long and tortuous history of strife; highly distorted images of the adversary; a chronically unstable pattern of regional politics; the intrusion of Great Power rivalry and a spiraling arms race: these are only some of the ingredients which account for the complexity and uniqueness of the Arab-Israeli conflict and make the Middle East the most volatile and explosive sub-system of the international political system” (Shlaim 1977, 97). When the United Nations adopted the resolution to divide Great Britain’s former Palestine mandate into Jewish and Arab states in 1947, tensions between Jewish and Arab groups in Palestine boiled over and the Arab world was outraged. That Jews had restaked a claim to what had been Arab land for centuries—and that they were defending this land against Arabs themselves—assaulted their reason and their dignity, not to mention their sense of nationalism. In 1948, the day after Israel declared itself an independent state, five Arab states declared war against Israel. After humiliating losses and ultimate defeat, the Arab coalition agreed to an armistice. Israel retained the territory it was granted under the U.N. resolution and gained much of the land the resolution had designated for the Arab state, precipitating a mass exodus of Arabs to Palestinian territories and neighboring Arab states.
This armistice held until 1967, when several aggressive maneuvers by Egypt goaded Israel to attack. Despite several other Arab states joining Egypt against Israel, the Jewish state again emerged the victor. This defeat was catastrophic for the Arab world, especially Egypt: “Nasser had himself...come to power when a group of military officers had been spurred by Israel’s defeat of the Arabs in 1948 into taking action to overthrow the government. Opposition to Zionism as well as to imperialism had been [a staple] of Nasser’s political rhetoric, along with the often-repeated promise that never again would Egypt be defeated by Israel. Lavishing funds on armaments and on the army, he had boasted that in any war with Israel, Egypt would achieve a swift and decisive victory” (Ahmed 2011, 65). Instead, Israel brought Egypt to the point of surrender in only six days, having inflicted severe losses and nearly annihilated the Egyptian air force. If the 1948 defeat had caused “an earthquake in the Arab personality” (qtd. in Ahmed 2011, 65), 1967 brought unspeakable devastation, shame, and rage.

Many in the Arab world came to see Israel as the remaining Western imperial outpost in the region. In *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967*, political scientist Fouad Ajami articulates this sentiment: “Israel [was] part of an ascendant, powerful Occident; the Zionist invaders [would] try to subdue [the Middle East] in the name of white civilization. This [was] the central challenge to the Arab world, a threat to its foundation” (1981, 69). Faced with such a threat, the Arab world soberly questioned the ideologies of nationalism, socialism, and pan-Arabism in which it had grown so confident. “The modern world had in a sense betrayed those who had made so much noise about their capacity to master that world” (79). The bitterness of this betrayal propelled Arab publics away from these modern ideologies, toward the traditional--“and tradition in the Arab world was deeply and ultimately Islamic” (72).
“There was suddenly a new logic and credibility to the Islamist argument that progress could be achieved only if the Arabs were guided by an indigenous political formula, namely that provided by Islam” (Tessler 1997, 11). That is not to say that the resurgence of Islam was merely a reaction to the anguish of 1967: it was no doubt the product of multiple converging political, economic, and social factors. To the leaders and activists of these Islamist groups themselves, the new popularity they were now enjoying signalled public hunger for the righteous rule of an Islamic state. But most scholars read the flourishing popular support for these movements differently. Some conceive of this new conservatism as a response to the shortcomings of the modern state model, which brought high economic inequality, ineffective bureaucracy, and rising unemployment. For many, the rise of Islamism was also due to the sense of community and continuity it offered to those withered by the harsh winds of industrialization, which saw mass migrations from rural villages to urban centers. Other scholars attribute Islam’s resurgence the brutality and corruption of the authoritarian regimes that had come to rule in so many Arab capitals. Indeed, Islamist movements provided the politically disillusioned a forum for political expression and organization in one of the few public venues legal under authoritarian regimes, the mosque. Still others point to the movements’ assertion of the supremacy and contemporary relevance of Islam, which they say appealed to Arab publics’ distress over their loss of cultural authenticity, as the previous chapter discusses, during and after the European colonial presence in the region.

All of these factors account for the popularity of Islamist groups to varying degrees, but the movement owes its success most of all to the implosion of its rival ideologies after 1967: “just as the defeat of ‘48 had led officers to conclude that the values, methods, goals, and ideals of the old regime were bankrupt and useless and must be swept away, this defeat
was read in the same way by the officers of the day" (Ahmed 2011, 65). The public mood across the Arab world turned penitent and spiritual, and many began to envision Israel’s victory as a “divine punishment for forgetting religion” (66). After struggling for decades against the goliath of Nasserism, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements were now poised to inherit their demised rival’s popularity. Thus, “it was not so much the achievements of conservative fundamentalism that won out,” as Ajami puts it, “the outcome was determined by the failure and exhaustion of the adversaries” (1981,155).

In the insurgency of Islamism against the failed ‘Western’ ideologies, however, Ajami recognizes a severer agitation than just the one expressed in this facile narrative--than just the notion of retreat to tradition as an equal and opposite reaction to the symbolic defeat of Arab modernism in 1967. The crisis he dubs ‘the Arab predicament’ in his 1981 work titled by the term is one of political and intellectual conscience: “What is behind the resurgence of Islam? How much is genuinely felt and how much is mere pretension by people and societies in desperate need of ideological cover to divert attention (their own and others’) from excessive wealth or from acute dependency on the very infidels they denounce?” (139-140).

Here Ajami is referring to the wealth and dependency that derived from “the unprecedented integration of the Arab world into the world economy and the extensive political and cultural advances of the United States into the region” (141)--both consequences of the oil boom and the overall trend toward economic liberalization during the 1970s.

Thus, ‘the Arab predicament’ refers to the region’s struggle to finally come to grips with the reality of Western preeminence, a reality that had existed for centuries but that, before the desolation of 1967, the Arab world had always held out hope to one day thwart. With this hope snuffed, Arab societies could only “stress their uniqueness and the great achievements of their ancestors all the more as they [surrendered] to others more powerful
and more glamorous than themselves” (Ajami 1981, 141). Ajami points out that at first glance Arab political culture after 1967 may seem to have been vacillating between two postures vis-à-vis the West--between relinquishing the dignity of its heritage for wealth and favor in the court of the West, on the one side, and on the other, welcoming weakness and exclusion with its defiance. Yet these two political postures were actually not contradictory, he insists, but rather “the two phenomena [were] twins” (141). In essence, then, what Ajami identifies as ‘the Arab predicament’ is that the apparent hypocrisy of the Arab world denouncing as infidels those on whom it depended was effectively irreconcilable, for “one [phenomenon led] to the other”: “reassertion and chauvinism [alternated] with self-doubt and mimicry....Authenticity [became] a refuge when practical politics [failed] to deliver concrete solutions to foreign weakness, to domestic breakdown, to cultural seduction” (141).

In his conclusion, Ajami does not demand that the Arab world give up its revolt against modernity--the insistent ‘hyperauthenticity’ and ‘tradition-mongering’ of Islamism--and just get on with the business of negotiating its place in a world run by the West. And he does not offer “a finished model that makes things work,...an alchemy that makes people and societies behave justly and rationally” (1981, 198). Instead, he upbraids those who would thoughtlessly dismiss the Arab world as barbaric or condemn it as a lost civilization: “it is easy to judge but hard understand the ghosts with which people and societies battle, the wounds and memories that drive them to do what they do. Even if we disagree with people’s choice of allegiance, we must understand the reasons for their choice, the odds they fight against, the range of alternatives open to them” (198).
The Predicament Perpetuated

Could Ajami’s diagnosis of the Arab predicament after 1967 be relevant today? Can it lend perspective to the questions at hand, namely why the Arab region lags behind the rest of the world in the movements toward democracy, at least in electoral competition, and gender equality? In their analysis of the Arab gap in electoral competitiveness, Stepan and Robertson briefly address the Arab-Israeli conflict as a possible cause of it. They note that “for many leaders of authoritarian Arab states, their proximity to, and involvement in, the geopolitical and military conflict with Israel (and Israel’s major, often Western and democratic, allies) is a key aspect of their--and the Middle East’s--distinctive political identity” (Stepan and Robertson 2003, 41-42). Stepan and Robertson suggest that the electoral gap may be the byproduct of the muscular authoritarianism Arab publics have tolerated for the sake of maintaining a strong front toward Israel: “Arab countries...spend a substantially higher percentage of their GDP on security than do the countries of any other region of the world” (42). But they also wonder about another potential connection between the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Arab electoral gap--one drawn from political scientist Eva Bellin’s analysis of Arab authoritarianism: that the United States buys Arab peace with Israel through its conditional support of Arab authoritarian regimes.

These two contrasting hypotheses about the possible connection among the Arab-Israeli conflict, Arab authoritarianism, and the Arab electoral gap seem to be mutually exclusive: how can these conflicting political interests--the Arab one for hawkish posture toward Israel and the Western one for peaceful posture toward Israel--find a tentative solution in common, namely the perpetuation of authoritarianism in Arab capitals? Ajami may not be as puzzled by this question as many scholars who have confronted it have been, for the political dynamics manifest in this apparent conflict of interests bear remarkable
resemblance to those on the post-1967 landscape. Indeed, they seem to be the same ‘twin phenomena’ Ajami describes as the Arab predicament--defiance and dependence. Authoritarian regimes please their publics by defying the will of the West and keeping their missiles pointed toward Israel, all while cooperating with the West to the extent its support requires. So could it be that the answer to riddle of the Arab electoral gap is itself a predicament, the same predicament that beset Arab political culture after the 1967 defeat?

This predicament may also be evident in the dualistic sentiments of contemporary Arab publics, which are defined at once by widespread hostility toward Israel and its Western supporters--leading to relatively high tolerance for strong, militaristic leaders--and by widespread support for democracy. In Ajami’s language, these would be markers of ‘reassertion and chauvinism’ and ‘self-doubt and mimicry,’ respectively. At this point in the region’s development, though, it seems that what Ajami identified as ‘self-doubt and mimicry’ has now matured into the genuine, confident conviction of Arab attitudes favoring democracy. But perhaps being fully converted to the Western political system of democracy makes the need for cultural authenticity all the more urgent in Arab publics--and thereby makes Ajami’s thesis truer than ever. At the very least, this reading of contemporary Arab political culture could go a long way toward explaining the growing momentum of Islamist movements--and their regressive pull against gender equality--since Ajami published his analysis in 1981.

Whether *The Arab Predicament* has retained its relevance today is almost as controversial a question as whether it was ever relevant in its own time. While many scholars no doubt acknowledge the deep historical impact of the 1967 defeat, including its contribution to the rise of Islamism and to anti-Western and anti-Israel sentiment, fewer
recognize it as a factor shaping contemporary Arab politics. In “The Transformation of the Arab World,” for example, political scientist Olivier Roy argues that there was no trace of ‘the Arab predicament’ in the rallying cries of Arab Spring protesters: “the demonstrators referred to no Middle Eastern geopolitical conflicts, burned no U.S. or Israeli flags, offered no chants in favor of the main (that is to say, Islamist) opposition parties, and expressed no wish for the establishment of an Islamic state or the implementation of shari’a.... It simply would not follow the script which holds that the centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict is fostering an ever-growing Islamization within Arab societies, a search for charismatic leaders, and an identification with supranational causes” (2012, 5).

However, Roy’s assertions encounter a challenge in fellow political scientist Shibley Telhami’s 2013 groundbreaking book *The World Through Arab Eyes*. The book presents findings culled from two decades of research on Arab public opinion, a political factor which he says was largely discounted by political scientists and foreign policy analysts until the Arab Spring uprisings began in 2010. With the uprisings, his own valuation of Arab public opinion was vindicated: “suddenly the attitudes of ordinary Arabs were inarguably the driving force across a large swath of the Middle East, not only shaping events as they happened but also laying foundations for politics in the years ahead” (Telhami 2013, 1). Several of Telhami’s observations resoundingly affirm the relevance of Ajami’s thesis for contemporary political analysis of the region. First of all, he acknowledges that the Arab Spring protests were fundamentally cries for *karamah*, or dignity--individual rights, liberty, and opportunity--and *eish*, or bread--basic economic needs. But moving against Roy’s argument, Telhami points out that “if the decade that preceded the Arab uprisings had been particularly disruptive...it was not because of a historically new type of economic deprivation or new modes of repression unknown by Arabs in decades past” (18). Rather, the overture to
the Arab Spring was very distinctly a theme of conflict with Israel and the West: “The most striking events of that decade were the collapse of the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations and the violent consequences beginning in 2000, the confrontation between the United States and Muslim countries following the tragedy of 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and especially Iraq, the bloody battles between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and, closer to home for Egyptians, the Israel-Gaza war in 2008-2009” (18).

Telhami contends that while the Arab Spring uprisings were not characterized by burning Israeli flags or slogans about supranational issues, much of the public anger directed against the region’s autocratic rulers was rooted in deep frustration over their geopolitical stances, not just their domestic policies: for example, “[Egyptians] believed it was important for their government to act to stop Israel’s war with Hamas in 2008, but their government seemed at best impotent and perhaps even hopeful that Hamas would be weakened by the war. As a result of such inconsistencies, Egyptians experienced a crisis of identity--brought about, not by confusion about who they are, but by a role in the world undertaken by their rulers in their name that looked nothing like who they are” (18). Telhami’s public opinion research abundantly justifies his placement of the Arab Spring uprisings in the wider context of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the ‘identity crisis’ to which it has subjected Arab publics. Perhaps most compelling is simply the revelation of the enduring prevalence in Arab public consciousness of the Israeli conflict: “The Palestinian-Israeli conflict issue remains the prism of pain through which most Arabs view the world....Even in the intense years of the Iraq war, Arabs continued to rank Palestine high in their priorities. In polls I conducted in six Arab countries between 2002 and 2008, those who ranked the issue to be at least among the top three issues to them personally ranged from highs of...86 percent in 2008, to lows of...73 percent in 2003, 2004, and 2006” (73, 78).
Secondly, Telhami’s public opinion surveys make it hard to deny his contention that the Arab region’s antagonism toward the West and particularly toward Israel’s greatest supporter, the United States, was also a strong current underlying the uprisings and the region’s broader political dynamics. From the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003 until the start of the 2011 uprisings, “Arab views of the United States were distinctively and consistently negative, averaging over 80 percent unfavorable” (111). In another illuminating finding, Telhami notes that “in 2011, a year after the uprisings started, my poll in Saudi Arabia showed that the ‘most admired world leader’ there was the late Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein, one of the most authoritarian rulers in the Arab world. Here was a moment of Arab aspiration for freedom and dignity, and yet Saddam Hussein outshone perceived Muslim democrats such as Turkey’s prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and others” (15). Telhami surmises that the reason Saddam Hussein is lionized by Arab publics is that he took a bold, uncommon stand against the United States. He observes the same phenomenon in answers to the question, “What aspect of Al Qaeda do you admire most, if any?” Though substantial pluralities said they admired nothing about the Islamist group, “Of the choices presented, the most common aspects chosen every year were that Al Qaeda ‘confronts America’ and that it ‘stands up for Muslim causes such as the Palestinian cause. Those who embraced Al Qaeda because of its aims to establish a Taliban-like Islamic state or because they liked the group’s methods of operation were a small minority” (117).

One further testament in Telhami’s research to the relevance of Ajami’s thesis in contemporary Arab political culture is his finding that negative Arab attitudes toward the United States were not really about fundamental values, whether political or moral: “Every time I asked a question about the primary source of anger and disappointment with the United States, an overwhelming majority of Arab respondents specified U.S. policies, not U.S.
values. On average, roughly 75 percent chose ‘policy’ while only 10 percent opted for values” (113-114). He concludes that Arabs’ resentment toward the West is ultimately about a sense of dignity that they feel robbed of by their repressive rulers, who they see as subcontractors for Western interests. It is this thirst for dignity, Telhami argues, that was the most powerful catalyst for the Arab Spring revolutions. “As Arab demonstrators everywhere made abundantly clear, the uprisings were in the first place about karamah, or dignity, and about ending a pervasive sense of humiliation. The dignity they hoped to restore was not simply in the relationship between rulers and ruled, but also in the relationship between their nations and the outside world….Above all, they want to hold their heads high” (17, 15).

As Telhami’s polls demonstrate, in addition to their desire for democracy and individual liberties, Arab publics are burdened and driven by their desire for dignity in the international arena. And more than anything, they identify the Arab-Israeli conflict as the primary obstacle to realizing that desire. The presence of Israel is a constant reminder that they are subject to the will of the West, a symbol of humiliation that they have no power to erase. Though without hope of reversing this humiliation, the Arab world has still sought to resist the Western domination that it represents. Arab publics have admired those who have stood up to the West, even Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. And they have sought democracy to rid themselves of the authoritarian regimes who are such unabashed lackeys of Western power. But even in placing their faith in democracy, they are acknowledging the superiority of the West, or at least their dependence on it. This knowledge has made the quest for cultural authenticity all the more frenzied and the defiance of Islamism all the more appealing. Indeed, as Telhami’s surveys reveal, the allure of Islamism for Arab publics is not the content of its political or moral values but its force as a political statement against the West.
Hence, the Arab predicament--the simultaneous postures of Arab defiance against and dependence on Western power--is indisputably present in contemporary Arab political culture. It is evident in the duality of Arab public sentiment--as well as in the duplicity of Arab rulers’ policies--toward Israel and the West. And it is evident in the continued momentum of Islamist movements and the simultaneous growth of public support for democracy. Not only do these dual and contradicting drives which Ajami calls the Arab predicament still exist Arab political culture, they seem to be the source of the puzzling Arab gaps in electoral competitiveness and gender equality. The electoral gap is, of course, the byproduct of resilient Arab authoritarianism, which in turn is made so for being a necessary evil to both pro- and anti-Israeli interests. Nowhere else in the world does the West, specifically the United States, have such vested interest in the maintenance of authoritarian regimes; and nowhere else are the sins of dictators so eclipsed by the ‘good deed’ of defying the West. Indeed, nothing can account for this incident of Arab exceptionalism better than Ajami’s notion of the Arab predicament.

But what about the Arab gender gap? The premise that the Arab region’s exceptionally low public support for gender equality can somehow be traced to a preoccupation about a six-day war four decades ago may at first seem to be quite tenuous, if not bizarre; yet it is actually the more straightforward of this thesis’ two claims. Conservative gender norms have no doubt been one of the distinguishing marks of Islam since its resurgence, and have calcified even as Arab support for democracy has ripened. Rizzo et al. observe in their 2007 study that the Arab region has the distinction of being the only place in the world where support for democracy is a predictor for disfavor of gender equality. It would be difficult to find a more exemplary instance of the Arab predicament, of the simultaneous embrace and eschewal of Western ways-- or more accurately, of modernity on Western terms.
As Ajami explains, “the determined traditionalization of culture [is] a response to the displayed forms and mimicry” (1981, 213). In their 2009 study “The Three Arab Worlds,” Rauch and Kostyshak wonder why the Arab region lags behind the world in female labor force participation: “Given the facts that Arab women are having fewer children and have greatly increased their levels of education, yet have only slightly increased their propensity to work outside their homes, standard economic theory suggests that they are choosing to spend their time raising higher-quality children and enjoying leisure rather than working. The question, of course, is whether this outcome is indeed their choice or whether it is being forced upon them, either by workplace discrimination or social pressure” (182-183). But regardless of whether this outcome is by choice or by force, there remains the question of why this outcome is unique to the Arab world. And the answer to that question can only be, as Ajami puts it, the sense that “assimilation into alien ways has gone far enough” (1981, 213).

In the closing words of The Arab Predicament, Ajami urges his Western audience to view the Arab return to tradition, to Islam, as a positive development if it “helps them to conquer some of the self-contempt that colonized people feel in the modern world” (1981, 199). But he cautions that it may only be positive “up to the point that the detour becomes the journey” (qtd. on 199). It seems that while resistance to the West is a detour that many in the post-colonial non-West have taken, the twin Arab gaps are indications that the detour has indeed become the journey for the Arab world. Yet if it was important for the West not to judge but to understand the Arab world in the wake of 1967, as Ajami stresses, it is even more important today. It is important to understand that “[Arab societies] feel constantly judged, scrutinized: Human rights campaigns point out their brutality; successful and sophisticated media put them and their methods of punishment, the way they treat one another, on
display. A more energetic Occident plays havoc with their sensibilities, gets more done, even recovers their own history for them....‘To [the Arab nativist] the whole world should be in the Arab world, instead of the Arab world in the whole world...It is a great pain to every people who who had once lived in a self-completed world to admit that their world is nothing other than a small part of the whole world’” (qtd. on 199-200). This wound has begun to close for many societies in the non-West; but for the Arab world, the continual agitation of the conflict with Israel keeps the wound raw. Unless that conflict is resolved, the closing of the Arab electoral and gender-equality gaps may be a long way off.
References


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