Politics of modern Muslim subjectivities: Islam, youth, and social activism in the Middle East. By Dietrich Jung, Marie Juul Petersen, & Sara Lei Sparre. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 228, ISBN: 978-1-137-38063-0.

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Politics of modern Muslim subjectivities: Islam, youth, and social activism in the Middle East is the second book published under the Modern Muslim World series. It is essentially a research collaboration by three academics with extensive experience in the Middle East.

At the outset, Jung, Petersen, and Sparre lament the current popular and academic discourses that claim the mutual exclusiveness of the Western and Islamic perspectives and reactions to modernity. This book is therefore an attempt to bridge the divide between both perspectives. In doing so, the authors contend that "...the construction of Muslim modernities also takes place with reference to social imaginaries similar to those which social theories has discerned in European history" (p. 2). They claim that there are more similarities than differences between Muslim and Western modern subjectivity formations, and that social theory can be used to study both types of modernities.

To prove their argument, the authors decide to conduct case studies of social welfare organisations in Jordan and Egypt to answer specific research questions outlined in the book's introduction (p. 3). In short, the authors want to investigate the seemingly ambiguous relationship between religions, specifically Islam, and the formation of modern Muslim collective and individual subjectivities in these organisations.

Due to the academic nature of the book, it is very articulately structured. Jung, Petersen, and Sparre divide the book into three main parts, each part containing three chapters. In Part I, the authors present the theory that underlines the research. Parts II and III are dedicated to two case studies which were conducted in Jordan and Egypt. This approach helps readers achieve a common understanding of the basis for the research before plunging into the details in Parts II and III.

In presenting their framework, the authors begin by conceptualising modernity, followed by the concepts of religion, social organisations and action, and later turn to the Islamic reaction to these concepts. This funnelling technique can be observed in their presentation of the two case studies. Both in Jordan and Egypt, the authors begin with a broad survey of the state and Islam in the respective countries, followed by the particular organisations studied, then ending the case studies reports by delving into the individual subjects within the organisations.

The two case studies conducted by Petersen and Sparre are in-depth and extensive. The researchers managed to access key informants within the organisations studied and even took part in some of the activities organised by them. The results of their hard-earned work are clearly evident in their well-written reports which were strewn with excerpts of interview transcripts of the organisations' leaders, management, staff, and volunteers. The reports are closely interlaced with the research framework, making sure that the readers do not derail from the initial objectives of the study.

Nonetheless, there are areas which the authors can consider improving. At first glance, the title of the book, *Politics of modern Muslim subjectivities: Islam, youth, and social activism in the Middle East,* can be rather misleading. Most readers would expect that the book would include more case studies from various countries in the Middle East. Their expectations fall short when they are only presented with two case studies, one in Jordan and the other in Egypt. Are Egypt and Jordan truly representative of the Middle East, which consists of many countries with different historical backgrounds, mixed population, political ideologies, and diverse stages of economic and social development? If the authors believe that Jordan and Egypt suffice as representatives of the Middle East, they should state their justification for choosing these countries early in the introduction.

In terms of its research methodology, there are several areas for improvement. Firstly, it is obvious that a lot of the data is collected from interviews conducted with social welfare organisations from Jordan and youth organisations in Egypt. For instance, in the section titled "Islamic Charities and the Management of Collective Action in Jordanian Civil Society" (Chapter Four) the authors claim that the Jordanian regime monitors and constricts the organisations' activities,

yet no interviews were conducted with government officials. Even if such interviews were conducted, none were presented in the book. By excluding the government's position, the book's objectivity may possibly be compromised.

The gender of the researchers may have some impact on the interviews. It is true that female researchers have better access to some of these organisations. Their gender would play nicely in organisations with majority women workers, but how about organisations with predominantly male leadership, workforce, and volunteers such as the Islamic Centre Charity Society in Jordan? In these organisations, their gender could be a limitation. How the researchers addressed these problems must be elaborated in the book.

Another slight omission is the beneficiaries of these social organisations. Readers may wonder why the beneficiaries were not interviewed. If the researchers were trying to gauge the religious motivations of these organisations, which led them to interview the leadership, employees, and volunteers, they should also interview the target group or beneficiaries as they are the ones directly affected by the organisations' programmes. Focusing on one side of the equation can undermine the objectivity of the research.

In terms of Muslim subjectivity formation, the authors touched very lightly on culture as a factor in subjectivity formation in the Middle East. To some readers, culture is a defining factor that differentiates the Muslims in the Middle East from Muslims in other parts of the world. The active participation of women in social organisations in the Middle East can be the result of the predominance of men in other spheres of life, which is a stark contrast to some Muslim societies in Southeast Asia and the West. This should be clearly tackled by the authors in the framework and the concluding chapters of the book.

After reading the case studies, especially on youth organisations in Egypt, there is a general perception that national pride and survival are stronger impetus for the existence of these organisations, rather than Islamic values. One can discern that the actual motivation behind the need to change is the general decline in Egyptian quality of life. Returning to Islamic values, thus, is a means to ameliorate the state of affairs for the youths in Egypt. Furthermore, some of the studied organisations claim that their basis for existence is non-religious, but

because they live in a Muslim country and are practicing Muslims, they are then considered to be religious in nature.

Politics of modern Muslim subjectivities is an excellent reference on the evolution of social organisations in Jordan and Egypt. It is a must read for academics, students, and researchers interested in the complex manner of how Islamic values fuel these organisations and their members. The strength of the book lies in its well-organised structure, extensive theoretical and analytical framework, and its carefully laid out arguments supporting the thesis. The case studies provide a wealth of information on the sampled social organisations. These strong points drown the minor drawbacks of the book. A relook at the title, methodology of the case studies, and the book's conclusions can easily remedy this setback.

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