

1 - Titolo del Progetto di Ricerca

THE "POSITIVE HONOUR": THE EMERGENCE OF NEW FORMS OF MASCULINITIES IN CONTEMPORARY JORDAN

2 - Settore scientifico-disciplinare a cui si riferisce il progetto

L-OR/10

3 - Abstract del progetto (max 5000 caratteri – una pagina)

Developed as a relatively new branch of research in the last decades of 20th century, masculinity studies play a role of utmost importance in uncovering some very uncommon features about men's gender role in contemporary Middle Eastern society. In this specific part of the world, men usually share and rely on common patriarchal values, in particular strength, virility and *sharaf* 'individual honour', to reassure their role both in the private and public spheres of society, thus enacting a violent heterosexual version of manhood over women, the so-called "hegemonic masculinity".

Starting from this premise, I suggest that a thorough investigation of a different kind of manhood which exists and resists to this dominant model should be brought to light. In particular, I argue that an emergent resistant male generation is arising in the Middle East, positioning itself inside the society in a completely alternative way from that of their fathers. By taking actions for gender equality and by participating in women's empowerment movements, men show themselves far from the need to uphold strength and traditional power positions, thus giving the word honour a new "positive" nuance of significance. Specifically, this research project will focus on the case-study of Jordan as it is a remarkable and pragmatic example of both the aforementioned issues: although honour here has always represented the main value to justify violent male behaviours, on the other side the recent increasing of men's commitment at the side of women could help to shed light on the reframing of modern masculinity in the contemporary Hashemite Kingdom.

My research project will be articulated in two phases: in the first one, through the use of sociological field research, I will deeply investigate structures and approaches of two organizations against *gender-based* violence in which men are highly involved, *I Change* and *HeforShe Jordan*. The purpose is evaluating the nature and importance of this commitment as well as whether this is genuine or still reflects a form of male authority over women. In the second phase, by the means of discourse analysis, I will further examine the role of so-called "third space" of internet, which includes social networks and online magazines against masculine stereotypes, starting with an online journal experience called *My.Kali Mag*. This analysis aims at understanding the contribution of modern technologies in spreading new narratives of mutual respect and rejection of toxic narration about masculinity. In conclusion, the research laid out here will try to determine whether it is possible not only to exonerate men from the simplistic image of perpetrator of violence attributed to them, but also to outline a new attitude among the youngest about their male gender role in the 21st century Jordan, an emergent value which I would label as a Middle Eastern "positive honour".

4 - Stato dell'arte (max 5000 caratteri – una pagina)

If the academic field of women studies abundantly arose over the last century focusing on the development of female role in society, conversely, it was only in the last decades of 20th century that masculinity studies emerged as a new interdisciplinary field of research (Gardiner, 2002). In continuity with feminist studies, this

brand-new branch of research deals with different meanings given to the label “masculinity”. It should be pointed out that differently from femininity, which has always represented a pivotal topic of research for academics, masculinity in the Middle East and North Africa area has not been intensively investigated among scholars. In fact, if “it was women who made gender visible” (Kimmel, 2001:1), on the other hand, studies on men’s role and their contribution to social development has always been widely summarized into public discourse to explain social and political disorders only by tracing them back to sexual frustration, poverty and unemployment. Thus, men’s reality in these changeable contexts and other emergent versions of manhood have been frequently mitigated or overshadowed. At the same time, an existing dominant model of masculinity, commonly referred to as the “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 2005:829), is particularly detectable in the patriarchal Middle East, as it often develops from very non-egalitarian societies where manliness and power usually overlap, expressing itself through violence and control. Nevertheless, this prevailing model only represents one of the multiple possible masculinities: indeed, a lot of less understood alternative forms of men’s enactments of their gender role in the 21st century appeared, essentialised in the plural expression of “emergent masculinities” (Inhorn, 2011:801).

Nowadays, despite the majority of Middle Eastern countries are characterized by coercive policies and repressive military interventions which support this hegemonic stereotype, many everyday experiences of manhood, fatherhood, sexuality and social relationships do not conform to this violent model. On the contrary, more and more men are now better inclined to date partners, preferring nuclear family and often supporting their daughter’s educational aspirations. Consequently, changing patterns of behaviour are also giving birth to new forms of men’s appropriations of spaces, often combining together women’s issues with masculine participation in social movements. This is for example the case of Jordan, where several organizations called both men and women to action against *gender-based* violence.

Regrettably, in spite of these premises, a greater concern has been addressed in male domestic and public violence, whereas few if nothing has been done to deeply investigate the role of men in achieving gender equality. This and all the other observations pointed out are the reason why I suggest that the project here proposed would represent a great contribution to the field of gender studies and in particular to those about masculinity, standing as a ground-breaking research of the Middle Eastern area. To make visible usually underestimated or misrecognized ‘emergent masculinities’ is also to reevaluate the settled approach scholars rely on, which is primarily based on behavioural exemplifications of discontent and violence to explain the crisis of modern man in the weakened late neo-liberal context. It should be additionally clarified that until now many researches of masculine studies also geographically reflected a wider attention upon Maghreb Area where, especially after the 2011 Arab Spring’s wave, social movements and protests have been generally considered as more in the spotlight. In this regard, several studies have been carried out, focusing on the reasons behind men’s participation in the protests or their role in street harassment increasing during the revolutions. Again, another decentralization has been produced: from men to women, from Mashreq to Maghreb. Consequently, I suggest that emerging masculinities, in particular those of Jordan area which not yet widely analysed, can be more accurately explored in order to shed a light on unfamiliar subjects and new male performances both in private and public sphere of everyday life, geographically and theoretically covering a large unresearched part of Middle Eastern gender studies.

5 - Bibliografia (max 5000 caratteri – una pagina)

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THE JORDANIAN CONTEXT BETWEEN HONOUR VALUE AND MEN'S COMMITMENT

Being at the forefront of the Middle Eastern area, Jordan has always represented the extreme defensive line in one of the most unstable regions in the world. Despite its lack of primary resources and petrol, since the 90's this country managed to maintain a mediating position inside the international arena. Nevertheless, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is currently facing a period of great instability, pressed between the need to control possible threats from the outside (terrorism, Syrian refugees crisis, widespread political disorder) and the responsibility to keep the promises of economic and political reforms made to its citizens (Maggiolini, 2017). In this regard, the taxation reforms and the cuts in subsidizing supported by the Mulki govern in 2018 ignited a revolt in the streets which has lasted for an entire week, recalling for one moment the 2011 Arab Spring wave that has marked the history of the Middle East. Arguably, even if it has rarely gone through mass protests or turmoil, this event shows that Jordan is not immune to general dissent or social demands. In an attempt to contain these protests and any violent exacerbation of disaffection from its population, the Hashemite Kingdom has thus reinforced its security apparatus, giving the military and the intelligence increased powers over any possible opposition to the State. This new face of governance, identifiable as the shift from the neoliberal State to a "human-security State" model (Amar, 2011a:42) have had a pivotal role in supporting the commonly accepted masculine stereotype while criminalizing and moralizing emergent aggregations and movements of men usually not conforming to it. By justifying their coercive power with the humanization of governance, the securitized nationalism moralistically promoted the regulation of sexuality through the return to a paternalistic society and patriarchal family model (Amar, 2011b). What is contradictory to note is that, despite the extreme efforts made on this colossal securitizing project against debauchery, unhealthy sexuality and immoral behaviours, Jordan is barely able to manage its internal problems in terms of male domestic violence and the so called "honour crimes", usually perpetrated by men against their female counterparts. Additionally, it must be highlighted that Jordan has one the highest world rate of honour killings (Human Rights Watch, 2016), a significant aspect to consider when analysing trends of violence in the MENA region. Starting from these observations, we have to consider that in the very tribal and patriarchal society of Jordan, the *sharaf* (individual honour) has always represented the main value men relied on in order to justify their behaviour and to hierarchically define their positioning inside the community they were part of. The passage from the objectivity of the biological state to the male gender role in society is thus punctuated by ceremonial experiences – circumcision, marriage, defloration of the wife - by which men can demonstrate their honour in terms of virility, fertility, strength and often violence (Bouhdiba, 2006). Consequently, even if with different averages in central and peripheral areas of the country, manhood here is experienced as a tool of control, abuse and prevarication. In light of this, to be man in Jordan means to perform the individual gender role throughout a strict behavioural code based on traditional values, whatever the cost. In this context, hence trapped between the existing tribal code of gendered behavioural norms and the State-promoted hypermoralization that helped reinforcing the model of hegemonic masculinity, men in Jordan can be easily and erroneously categorized into two layers: those who conform with their tribal roots and expectations by exercising their right to power and violence - mainly from the suburbs and peripheral areas - and those who never deliberately take a position against gendered crimes and inequality but eventually gain advantages by their masculinity – generally, young middle class men. But are we sure that these two representations of masculinity are the only two existing?

METHODOLOGIES AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

This research project aims to investigate whether it is possible to exonerate men from the traditional image of sole women's keepers as well as usual perpetrator of violence. Starting from these positions, the research question will be focused on two main areas:

1) New means of identity construction: men's participation in gender equality movements and demands against *gender-based* violence in contemporary Jordan;

Generally, the 21st century masculinity in the Middle East has been commonly investigated by the majority of scholars through the lens of crisis: the loss of patriarchal privileges, the end of neo-liberal power, the revenging of human rights movement as well as the downfall of traditional family models, the reproductive diseases and the ongoing reform process in the field of marriage, divorce and repudiation are all considered as inevitable steps towards the dawning of middle eastern patriarchal masculinity as we knew it until now. Differently from this narrative and avoiding any redundant speculation, this project research sets itself as an innovative tool of analysis of emergent masculinities, focusing on new male experiences in the Jordanian movements against *gender-based* violence and their contribution for gender equality. I use "emergent" not only in relation to the highly developed field of sexual orientation or gender discourses, but more widely considering the reframing of self-consciousness young generations of Jordanians are gaining about their role in the public and private spheres. In this sense, men's commitment will be deeply analysed in all its socio-economic aspects as well as the impact this new positioning is having on society and its gendered institutions. Methodologically, a comparative analysis of two men's experiences of contribution and involvement in Jordanian associations, both committed against *gender-based* violence, will be pointed out: the autonomous association "*I Change*" (I Change, n.d.) and the experience of "*HeForShe Jordan*" (HeforShe Movement, n.d.), local branch of a global solidarity movement for gender equality. Born autonomously in Amman from the idea of the 17 years old student Esraa Kudair, *I Change* movement first started its activism online in 2017 and immediately became the only organized group in Jordan against penal code's leniency towards honour killings. In particular, Kudair called for action both men and women, especially young people, against the application of art. 340 and art. 98 of Jordanian penal code, both referring to honour killing's exculpatory circumstances. I claim that the *I Change* case study is of pivotal importance when it comes to male participation in protests and appropriation of public spaces. In fact, as revealed by a personally conducted interview with Tony Dabbas, young activist of *I Change* movement, almost 70% of participants to its initiatives against honour crimes turned out to be young males whose purpose was not only to take position next to their female counterparts, but most importantly to challenge the widespread stereotype about men and violence in their country. In this regard, in 2017 activists of *I Change* took a protest under the Jordanian Parliament, demanding the abrogation of both the previously mentioned articles of penal code. Remarkably, they had a role in the obtaining of art. 98 amendments and also received an invitation by deputies Nawaf al-Nuaimat e Suleiman Huwailah al-Zabn to parliamentary sessions about honour killings scheduled for that month ("Manifestanti contro la legge giordana, incoraggia il delitto d'onore", 2017). Alongside, the *HeForShe* movement in Jordan is the local branch of a global movement for male's contribution to the equality cause. The Jordanian segment has become widely known when Leith Abu Taleb, a young activist and entrepreneur from Amman, mobilized more than 22,000 commitments by leading workshops throughout the country. The ultimate goal of the movement is to redefine masculinity especially among young people, highlighting the need for men to act against violence and inequality in the Levantine country, with particular attention for universities and other educational contexts. *HeForShe Jordan* regularly promotes debates, focus groups, public talks and workshops in the universities in order to raise awareness about gender issues and new male perspective on these subjects. Furthermore, the movement doesn't stand alone: co-working with global governmental organizations such as *UN Women* as well as local NGOs (*Mentor Arabia*, *SIGI*), this particular experience of participation sees men engaged in constantly providing both online contents on their official platforms and practical experiences to men not yet involved. What has to be pointed

out is that the mission of this movement is not only to spread theoretical knowledge about male solidarity with women, but primarily to persuade as much men as possible to make a move towards a new direction, as compared with previous masculine stereotypes they usually dealt with. With these premises, a sociological field research will be indispensable as a tool of analysis of both the experiences mentioned earlier. Direct engagement and field presence will help further uncovering hidden and deeper features of men's involvement: operating methodologies, common tools (contents, flyers, posters, events), areas of intervention, favourite audience and outcomes achieved in the last years by both the associations will be deeply investigated. Furthermore, the aim of this study is also to bring to the surface the existing differences between local and global associationism for gender equality: in particular, economical resources and donors role will be examined to better understand to what extent these different structures can influence final results and receptivity of initiatives.

Alongside the movement's investigations, the second phase of this research project will be entirely focused on the impact of this involvement on the Jordanian society, firstly by analysing whether it can be understood as a positive shift of balance from commonly known narratives about hegemonic masculinity to new reframing of men's role, with particular attention for their visibility and presence on the so-called "third space" (Newsom & Lengel, 2012:32) of internet:

2) From "maīdān" to social networks: men's re-appropriation of spaces, the dismantling and reframing of honour stereotypes through internet and modern technologies;

As a general rule, it can be stated that when a gender related issue has to be challenged it is mostly women who occupy not only the streets and the public *maīdān* (town square) but also the "third space" of internet, hitting the headlines and news sites thanks to the echoing of their reports. For example, this is particularly true for the events occurred in 2006 with the *MeToo Movement* (MeToo, n.d.) against sexual harassment in Hollywood, which after the first reports produced a wave of protests that has later become widespread around the globe, including the Middle East. Nevertheless, this public feminist positioning, which with no doubt is still necessary to achieve gender equality, often overshadows less known stories about men's ability to gather up, discuss and be part of debates. Men's involvement is rarely highlighted, and this is even more true in many Middle Eastern countries where, as previously suggested, masculinity studies developed slower than those about women, also due to the patriarchal background which usually prevents any assault on hegemonic masculinity model.

In this context, social platforms could represent an alternative way for men to make their voices heard. In this sense, I use the term "*re-appropriation*" to highlight the differentiation from the traditional male positioning into streets - that of harassers - and also as a claim for that space of revendication men have been partially dispossessed by women's movements acclaim and notoriety. If many women's protests relied on social platforms to encourage girls all over the world to embrace the equality cause, I'm wondering if this could be true also for men and to what extent possible experiences may achieve the same final goal. Firstly, the focus of this second part of research will be on how young Jordanian men are involved at women's side not only through social movements in the public sphere - exemplified here by the term *maīdān* - but also on the internet (*social networks, blogs, communities*) and how they publicly express their dissent to patriarchal values through these modern tools. In doing so, I will start from the example of a Jordanian online magazine, *My.Kali Mag*, (MyKali.Mag, n.d.) born in 2007 and immediately become a space where the hegemonic manhood and the honour stereotypes are continuously dismantled and reframed through researches, interviews and reports. Consequently, I argue that an in-depth discourse analysis as well as a research of other similar experiences will help uncovering how these men deal with their new positioning. In particular, interviews will be essential to understand the new challenges they have to face in family, workplace and social spaces for sharing same goals

of their female counterparts. Finally, having the chance to directly investigate this new trend will be of utmost importance in drawing the map of new emergent masculinity attitudes in the area.

7 - Risultati attesi e ricadute applicative (max 3000 caratteri – mezza pagina)

From the 1970's onward, women's studies have continuously inspired scholars to deeply investigate the female role in all its sociological and historical declinations (sexuality, race, class, religion, access to resources, labour conditions). On the other side, dominated by these core issues, the field of gender studies partially left men behind, only indirectly examining their contribution on society. This is particularly true for what concerns the Middle Eastern and Maghreb Area, where the context of dominant patriarchal society understandably supported the need to highlight women's agency and answers to male threats and dominance.

As it places itself in this not widely researched area, the project here proposed tries to bring new findings and evidences to the field of masculinity studies, partially bridging the lack of study research on men's participation in movements for equality in the Middle East. In particular, starting by the remarkable case-study of Jordan the research suggests the existence of unrecognized and unfamiliar shades of masculinity whose role in society collides with the dominant hegemonic model, partially dismantling everyday theories that see middle eastern men not only as usual perpetrators of violence but also unable to visibly side women for the equality fight. Therefore, the study of the nature of this male commitment can raise a new perspective of discussion on modern gender roles in the area, hopefully corroborating the previous formulation on "positive honour" which distinguishes new male generations from those of the past. Furthermore, trough the discourse analysis of online male endeavour, a map of a new male public positioning may be drawn, contributing to shed light on contents, narratives and tools by which young Jordanians deliberately choose to act against *gender-based* violence in their country.

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