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EMPOWERING GOVERNMENTALITIES RATHER  
THAN WOMEN: THE *ARAB HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005* AND WESTERN  
DEVELOPMENT LOGICS

The researchers and writers of the *Arab Human Development Report 2005 (AHDR 2005)*<sup>1</sup> include activists, social critics, intellectuals, and feminists who aspire for *izdihār* (flourishing) in the Arab world “based on a peaceful process of negotiation for redistributing power and building good governance.”<sup>2</sup> This passage suggests that the aims the *AHDR 2005* shares with the previous three volumes are to encourage state apparatuses and officials to *transform themselves* by changing policies and surrendering some of the power and resources they have fortified vis-à-vis their citizenries. This article argues that rather than encouraging the rise of women or any group interested in political or social transformation, the *AHDR 2005* works within a U.N. development framework that strengthens states and political elites in relation to their populations by constituting the former as the causes of underdevelopment and thus the primary agents for economic, social, and political improvement.

Such a strategy shifts attention from the negative development impacts of neoliberal capitalism, colonialism, war, imperialism, and Western support for repressive regimes and opposition to democratic ones, as well as other varieties of inequitable North–South relations and histories. This strategy also reinforces the logic of national and transnational governmentalities, which are designed to blunt and co-opt social, economic, and political challenges that may fundamentally improve the situations of peoples in the Arab region. The U.N. development framework in fact gives little attention to oppositional forces and resistance movements as sources that create and compel development. The U.N. Development Programme’s (UNDP) logic is particularly seductive because its focus on “good governance” and “well-being” seems to be at odds with, rather than complementary to, crass neoliberal capitalist interests and the *realpolitik* of Western states.

As other analysts have argued was the case with previous AHDR volumes,<sup>3</sup> the 2005 report is often disjointed in diagnosing causes and solutions for underdevelopment. The authors of the *AHDR 2005* are frequently snared in the contradictions of using the report to make radical critiques of undemocratic and authoritarian Arab state regimes

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and repressive Western state policies within a discursive framework sponsored by the UNDP, paid for to some degree by wealthier Arab states, and whose purpose seems to be to reinforce economic, political, and cultural agendas supported largely by the United States and Western-dominated organizations. Indicating the conflicting agendas embodied in the *AHDR 2005*, in a foreword UNDP administrator Kemal Dervis remarkably attempts to distance the organization from parts of the *AHDR 2005*. Dervis calls for “moderation” and “arguments based on reason and respect for the views of the ‘other’” and criticizes the authors for “at times us[ing] language that is unnecessarily divisive.”<sup>4</sup>

The dissonance is an inevitable rather than an unfortunate aberration given how the AHDRs and their authors are materially, politically, and discursively situated. Despite the critical and transformative aims of many of the authors involved in the *AHDR 2005* who express their counterhegemonic positions and disagreements at various points, the report nevertheless fits within a development logic that reinforces rather than challenges Arab state power, Western state interests, and transnational governance. Given the *AHDR 2005*’s material and discursive situatedness within the neoliberal human development framework, it is not surprising that it deploys the term “freedom” in ways that allow and disallow particular subjectivities and largely bypasses opposition or resistance as valuable sources of transformation in Arab societies. This development logic has consequences for how Arab women and their problems are represented.

Terms and translations have occasionally substantive implications in the *AHDR 2005*. The words “freedom” and “empowerment” have particular and delimited meanings in Western development discourse, which for at least two decades has targeted women of the global South as in special need of both. Although the word “empowerment” (*tamkīn*) is referenced in various UNDP online documents describing the AHDR and is used frequently in the English language *AHDR 2005* document, it is translated as “rise” (*nuhūd*) in the English and Arabic titles of the *AHDR 2005*. The authors explain that the idea of the “rise” of women is more indigenous to Arabic than their “empowerment” and is preferred to “connote woman’s struggle for her rights through the building of her capacity and its effective use in a conducive societal framework.”<sup>5</sup>

It is invariably awkward to take a critical academic perspective on policy-oriented projects because the latter are governed by specific mandates, political logics, time regimes, methodologies, and funding structures. However, real-world projects are also saturated with philosophical and political assumptions that must be engaged because they can have very material consequences in the lives of groups targeted for transformation. Such assumptions frame and determine something to be a problem, are attached to methods that will measure and provide evidence of the problem, and are embedded in the suggested solutions.

#### EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF THE AHDR

Although the *AHDR 2005* is more politically radical than previous volumes, it works within the same overall framework and assumptions. Like previous AHDR volumes, it assumes that Arab-identified states and territories *are* a coherent region (the positive or descriptive mode) and argues that they *should be* so (the normative mode) in development terms. One consequence is that the *AHDR 2005* averages development indicators across states with very different levels of wealth by dint of belonging to the

Arab world, criticisms also raised by Marc Lavergne regarding the *AHDR 2003*.<sup>6</sup> In a related contradiction that threads throughout the 2005 report, the authors call for unified state agendas based on Arab identity despite resource and ideological differences and regular competition and conflict among regional states and leaders. In a similar vein, the assumption that Arabs are part of a coherent community misses how all communities are fractured along a variety of socioeconomic, ideological, historical, and cultural axes.<sup>7</sup>

As noted in a critique of *AHDR 2003* by Brigitte Dumortier, regional political constructs such as the European Union are built over time and assumed to be contested projects rather than treated as reflecting “a brilliant common past.”<sup>8</sup> The former orientation realistically assumes that regional cooperation must be built so that the mutual benefits of bridges outweigh the one-sided benefits of borders.<sup>9</sup> If broad-based and inclusive development is truly a goal, regional unions or communities should not be limited to the interests of state, international, security/military, and corporate entities but should be built within and across state coordinates by workers, environmentalists, feminists, and other activists who can articulate demands; make rights-based claims; redistribute resources; and hold state, so-called nongovernmental, military/security, and corporate entities of any scale accountable for inequities, repression, and corruption.

Consistent with the conclusions of earlier AHDRs, the authors of the 2005 volume determine the Arab region to be on the bottom rung of world regions in terms of political and civil freedoms. It is axiomatic in the AHDRs that democracy deficits in Arab countries *cause* economic underdevelopment. Moreover, the solutions offered often reinforce “western and more specifically U.S. [economic, intellectual, political] influence on Arab societies.”<sup>10</sup> Critics of the causal connections made in previous volumes of the AHDR between democracy and development have drawn on converse empirical evidence from other countries and regions and deeper analysis of Arab societies to support their critiques.<sup>11</sup>

Such critics have also noted that the AHDRs ignore or understate, and certainly do not empirically measure, the degree to which the U.S. government reinforces repressive Arab states that support U.S. foreign and economic policies. Also slighted are regional histories of foreign or proxy military interventions, wars, and colonization (including by the State of Israel) that limit Arab states’ sovereignty and development choices<sup>12</sup> and reinforce Arab state authoritarianism; Western state and corporate encouragement of (and profiteering from) military spending by Arab states, which reduces the potential for spending on human welfare;<sup>13</sup> and Western state and multinational corporate support for Arab state control and repression of popular demands for political accountability, representation, and fair distribution of wealth. United States political elites have historically been much more interested in stability rather than democracy<sup>14</sup> in Arab and other non-Western or previously colonized countries, particularly if they are perceived as friendly to U.S. economic and political interests.

In the *AHDR 2005*, the authors in fact strongly criticize U.S. foreign and domestic policies, including support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine; the invasion, occupation, and destruction of lives, heritages, and environment in Iraq; a wide-ranging “war on terror” deemed not to recognize legitimate struggles of resistance or dissent and to have encouraged further repression by Arab states<sup>15</sup>; and secret rendition, incarceration of Muslims without charge or trial, and torture that have involved some Arab

governments.<sup>16</sup> The authors call “foreign occupations . . . grave violations of human rights.”<sup>17</sup> They further contend that current global governance systems are unfair toward less powerful states and selective in application of laws and policies, which reinforces hopelessness and extremism in the region.<sup>18</sup> Double standards are illustrated by reference to Western-government calls for elections and democracy but rejection of results they find unacceptable.<sup>19</sup>

Critics have noted how previous AHDR volumes did not address “the inherent contradictions” between calls for “political, economic, and social freedoms.”<sup>20</sup> As Dumortier argues in her critique of the 2003 volume, the AHDR reflects more than fifteen years of Western development logic that considers “development and globalization . . . as intrinsically linked” in contrast to “a growing number of more and more organized movements and networks [that] see the end of development coming with the advancement of [neoliberal] globalization.”<sup>21</sup> There are other examples of potential contradictions among “freedoms” assumed to be in accord with each other. Privatization, state deregulation, and liberalization for foreign investment, for instance, often reinforce inequities, maldistribution of resources, and less entrepreneurship in Arab states.<sup>22</sup> State repression has sometimes produced resistant explosions of knowledge and information, thus expanding freedoms in these arenas.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, one can have “knowledge” and not widespread “material well-being.”<sup>24</sup> In addition, conservative movements taking state power through fair elections may decrease the freedoms of some social sectors.

Illustrating their complex positioning, the authors of the *AHDR 2005* state at one point that unfettered economic globalization is based on mechanisms and existing resource distributions whereby the most economically and politically powerful countries become more powerful, immiserating Third World men and women by exporting Northern “‘industrial garbage’ in environmental, social, and economic terms to the countries of the South.”<sup>25</sup> The authors at other points also contradict the development value of neoliberal structural adjustment and privatization policies because Arab professional women are disproportionately employed by state or public sectors in the region.<sup>26</sup>

#### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON WOMEN’S STATUS

The *AHDR 2005* findings and recommendations with respect to women’s status at times work within Western neoliberal development and global gender frameworks and at other times challenge them. In terms of poverty and work, the *AHDR 2005* findings are inconsistent with the global assumption underlying international development discourse that women are poorer than men; Arab women in the five states for which the researchers had data are not poorer than their countrymen, although the report finds that women are “deprived of opportunities to acquire capabilities and use them to secure the elements of human welfare.”<sup>27</sup> The authors also find that Arab women’s economic participation in formal labor markets remains the lowest in the world, with only one third of girls and women fifteen years or older employed,<sup>28</sup> although they criticize international comparative development statistics for underestimating and undervaluing women’s participation in informal economies and unpaid household work.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, they contend that women “pay a high price under the rules of the new market” in the Arab region, found most often in “free economic zones” that provide some women with “insecure temporary work contracts and humiliating work conditions.”<sup>30</sup> Such work conditions

make the additional value of higher labor-force participation unclear for Arab women who cannot attain high-status jobs.<sup>31</sup>

In terms of marriage- and family-related laws, the *AHDR 2005* authors assume that legal codification is good for women and necessary in order to discourage “traditions” that limit their options and opportunities.<sup>32</sup> They call for the limited number of Arab states that have not done so yet to codify, in “clear” and “precise” terms, personal status laws.<sup>33</sup> The report at times assumes that lack of codification explains the “conservative and resistant” nature of laws related to family life<sup>34</sup>; yet, in fact, gender inequality with respect to guardianship, child custody, marriage, and divorce *exists and can be transformed* in state-codified or noncodified forms. The *AHDR 2005* calls for all marriage and divorce-related negotiations to occur through state courts, including *requiring* reconciliation processes monitored by the state, and commends the Egyptian family courts for restructuring that allowed reinforcement of such state power.<sup>35</sup> The authors of the *AHDR 2005* make clear their disapproval of the rise of consensual sexual and marital contracts that are not registered with state authorities.<sup>36</sup> The expansion of state power in these arenas is seen to be for the protection of women, although it seems to have further empowered the state over both men and women.

On women’s rights on a broader scale, the authors of the *AHDR 2005* argue that Arab states must increase freedoms in line with international law and protocols. Ubiquitous is the report’s call for full implementation and stronger enforcement mechanisms, presumably by non-Arab states, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), especially as applied to personal-status laws.<sup>37</sup> The support for CEDAW is the most consistent recommendation in the *AHDR 2005*, although at one point the authors worry that normative texts such as CEDAW “cannot represent the particularity of local struggles on the ground or all civic demands on the international front.”<sup>38</sup> Indicating how they are contradictorily situated between indigenous and Western hegemonic discourses, the authors argue that CEDAW articles can be consistent with Muslim cultural sensibilities by opening the door to what is called *ijtihad* (dynamic exegesis based on the Qur’an).<sup>39</sup> However, as Lila Abu-Lughod points out in her essay in this issue, *AHDR 2005* authors do not engage with the various ways in which Muslim women activists in the region, working within Islamic discourse and texts, have for years been making epistemological and practical challenges to male-biased practices and beliefs.<sup>40</sup>

The *AHDR 2005* recommends state implementation of CEDAW<sup>41</sup> despite the fact that many, even the vast majority, of poorer Muslim women will reject the CEDAW premise of total gender equality with regard to housing provision, economic maintenance of the marital home and children, and child support in case of divorce, given that Islamic jurisprudence has historically placed great emphasis on male responsibility in these arenas. Indeed, this “traditional” logic may explain why poverty and economic well-being in Arab countries are not necessarily feminized and masculinized. The CEDAW approach, Shaheen Sardar Ali contends, assumes “that underdevelopment and gender inequality in the Third World are caused by traditional values and social structures.” She argues further that the women’s rights discourse that frames CEDAW is too often taken for granted as universally applicable to all women when it is embedded in Western liberal histories and notions of self and family. The CEDAW framework ignores that “in the African and Asian contexts most women rely on entitlements embodied in family

and community relationships that do not relate to 'equal rights' language. Similarly, religion forms an important part of many women's identity. They are not comfortable with being asked to frame their identities within a discourse that is avowedly secular."<sup>42</sup> The point here is that Arab Muslim women, especially the vast majority who are poor or working class, may have good cultural and material reasons to prefer indigenous frameworks or to insist on improving such frameworks rather than replacing them with CEDAW.

On political representation, the *AHDR 2005* authors argue that development requires societies of freedom and good governance in which states ensure "citizens' well-being and their security."<sup>43</sup> They contend that "good governance" requires the inclusion of women through quotas and "positive discrimination" if necessary.<sup>44</sup> The authors criticize Arab governments for responding to criticism of authoritarian or undemocratic practices by initiating surface reforms<sup>45</sup> and recognize that selective focus by Arab states on improving women's status allows these states to avoid more fundamental transformations while pleasing Western donors and states whose putative concern for Arab women often seems to be a fetish.<sup>46</sup>

Further in this critical vein, the authors of the *AHDR 2005* note that Western actors often mobilize a rights discourse in "crass," even theatrical, "crusades" to "free" women<sup>47</sup> and have demonstrated they have little trouble imposing preferred gender regimes by force. This makes it difficult for local gender-transformational projects to succeed and helps to produce stark absolutes in the region whereby gender equality projects are often understood and constructed as cover for Western imperialism and women gender activists are represented as inauthentic.<sup>48</sup> The authors challenge such oppositional or binary cultural distinctions (e.g., West vs. East) in Arab countries and encourage collaboration with international women's organizations.<sup>49</sup> Given the authors' critique of the forcible imposition of alternative gender regimes by foreigners, the report is equivocal in its assessment of postcolonial Tunisia, whose more equitable gender laws and policies have largely been the result of an authoritarian state project. At points the authors criticize the lack of democracy and space for civil-society organizations in Tunisia, and at other points they applaud Tunisia's unparalleled "progress" on women's rights.<sup>50</sup>

#### "HUMAN DEVELOPMENT" AND TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST GOVERNMENTALITY

A major problem with the *AHDR 2005* is that it constitutes women as a global category. This essay contends that international measures such as the human development index (HDI) and the "global women's rights" discourse used by the UNDP and other Western international organizations selectively authorize subjectivities, freedoms, and transformations. The HDI and global women's rights discourse are part and parcel of transnational feminist governmentalities, which manage, normalize, and even constitute a range of inequalities among women. They also often facilitate militarized and humanitarian interventions rather than encourage fundamental improvements in most women's lives. The authors of the *AHDR 2005* generally work within these hegemonic development and women's rights discourses, although they occasionally challenge them as well.

Assuming gender to be a superordinate axis of identity and location imagines alliances between women while underplaying economic, labor, ideological, religious, ethnic, political, and other divisions and differences among women within Arab countries, across Arab countries, and in relation to different groups of women in the remainder of the world. Womanness on its own is a reductive axis for transformational projects. However, gender conceived in this manner is often the basis for much of the global, international, and transnational activism and interventions, especially when targeting “oppressed” women living in or from Third World countries.

In such a global feminist framework, all women are marked as subjects of male victimization and violence worldwide. Indeed, Third World women are often perceived to be additionally victimized by their cultures, what Uma Narayan has critically termed “death by culture.”<sup>51</sup> Arab men and women are included in such global patterns of gender oppression and victimization, although women’s bad lot is perceived to be compounded by their Arab and Muslim cultural values and practices. Within such understandings, the major task of intervention is to have Arab and other oppressed women “recognize” this global subject-position, which requires them to gain a universalized understanding of womanhood. The *AHDR 2005* works within such a global gender framework, which constitutes Arab women as part of a world population of victimized women with shared interests in biopolitical terms.<sup>52</sup> This global gender positioning is operative despite evidence to the contrary, including the *AHDR 2005*’s findings of high rates of Arab disapproval for violence against women.<sup>53</sup>

The AHDRs rely to a large degree on the HDI established on the basis of economist Amartya Sen’s reasonable contention that gross national product (GNP) is an inadequate measure of the well-being and quality of life of people within countries. The HDI is a composite measure of “average achievements” for states that encompasses three dimensions: life expectancy, educational enrollments and literacy levels, and economic “standard of living” defined by a “logarithm of [per capita] income.”<sup>54</sup> More important than GNP, Sen argues, are factors such as “distribution of resources,” their impact on people’s lives, life expectancies, health care, work availability, educational access, and so on.<sup>55</sup> These factors, Sen insists, better evaluate a person’s “advantage” in terms of her ability to “achieve” “various ‘functionings’” in daily life.<sup>56</sup> Of great importance, this approach does not ensure resources but is concerned with everyone having the “*capability* to compete for and secure” them.<sup>57</sup> As feminist analysts of mainstream development agendas note, “Though Sen’s focus on capabilities provides a framework for the study of empowerment, feminists need to be wary of . . . his lack of attention to the political processes required for equitable resource distribution that could lead to general empowerment.”<sup>58</sup>

The principal researchers of the first AHDR, in particular Egyptian economist Nader Fergany, controversially “innovated” the HDI into an alternative Arab HDI (AHDI) to assess development in the Middle East and North Africa region. The AHDI adds a “freedom score” to measure “enjoyment of civil and political liberties.” It includes a measure for “internet hosts per-capita” and has a “carbon dioxide emissions per-capita” penalty. It also excludes the income measure of the HDI in order to “de-emphasise the importance of average income.”<sup>59</sup> The *AHDR 2005* relies on the HDI and not AHDI rankings in the appended tables, although its chapters are conceptually organized to address political and civil freedoms.

Building on Sen's theory and working with him under U.N. auspices, liberal feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum further contends that because transnational comparative data indicate women as a category to be worse off than men as a category in "most parts of the world," and women's presumed generalized subordination means they do not necessarily have the "expectations and desires" they would have if they were not subordinated, a cross-national "nonrelative" index assessing women's "capabilities" across cultures and states was necessary.<sup>60</sup> In this "global" understanding, women cannot be asked what they want because they would simply "affirm the status quo."<sup>61</sup> Nussbaum's "Aristotelian approach" assumes that there is "a single objective account of the human good, or human flourishing," and a single morality, the underlying features of which must be found, presumably after peeling off "all local traditions."<sup>62</sup>

Two additional capabilities measures informed by these ideas were developed for the HDRs in the mid-1990s: the gender-related development index (GDI), a composite of the HDI measures adjusted for gender disparities, and the gender empowerment measure (GEM) to evaluate women's "agency," defined as their economic and political opportunities.<sup>63</sup> The GEM index used in the *AHDR 2005* is composed of a ratio of male-to-female income per capita and the percentage of female professional and technical workers, female legislators or senior officials in government, and female-held parliamentary seats.<sup>64</sup> The 2005 report includes GEM and GDI rankings for the Arab countries for which the researchers had data<sup>65</sup> and integrates the substantive concerns of those two measures.

Constituting women as a world population is critical to what Inderpal Grewal terms the "transnational production of global feminist subjects" of governance that aims to improve their well-being.<sup>66</sup> This now hegemonic trend of practice and discourse has been termed transnational feminist governmentality<sup>67</sup> and has been criticized by some feminist scholars and activists. Governmentality, according to Michel Foucault, is a "complex form of power" applied by states to reinforce themselves. It aims to "establish a continuity" between the head of state and the individuals governed so that in a "well-run" state, "individuals will . . . behave as they should." The "ultimate end" of governmentality is "the welfare of the population ["above all else"], the improvement of its condition, the increase in its wealth, longevity, health, etc." This form of power relies on the statistical enumeration of populations and their problems and specific apparatuses to maintain social order, and it requires the development of certain areas of knowledge and tactics.<sup>68</sup> From a governmentality perspective, the idea that there is a "boundary between the state and civil society is . . . an effect of power" that serves to reinforce the state and mystify the range of circuits and mutual dependencies that exist between formally state and nonstate apparatuses (e.g., religious institutions, nonprofit organizations, universities, banks, and corporate entities).<sup>69</sup>

James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta have been among the theorists who have articulated the related idea of "transnational governmentalities" to capture the similar workings and techniques of transnational and supranational governance structures and discourses dominated by the interests of powerful states and groups but ostensibly focused on the "well-being" of people in the world.<sup>70</sup> The UNDP is arguably the most powerful and wealthy of the multilateral organizations working in the capacity of transnational governmentality. According to its website,

UNDP is the U.N.'s global development network, an organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience, and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.<sup>71</sup>

The range of apparatuses, processes, and discourses associated with transnational governmentality has been particularly salient since the 1980s. Among other things, transnational governmentalities discursively construct "global civil society" as separate from "global governance" structures, and states as distinct from international government systems, although these domains operate in mutually constitutive relationships, as indicated in the previous passage from the UNDP website.<sup>72</sup> In addition, such differentiations mystify the actual centers of gravity in terms of power and resources, thus blunting frontal challenges.

Organizations such as DAWN, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, have long recognized that development projects do not "give principal emphasis to the basic survival needs of the majority of the world's people."<sup>73</sup> Such development paradigms historically assumed that "women's main [problem] in the Third World was insufficient participation in an otherwise benevolent process of growth and development," even as the first U.N. Decade for Women (1975–85), with its explosion of development projects, coexisted with dramatic worsening of the socioeconomic situations for the majority of Third World women and men, as well as increased militarization, foreign interventions, and domestic repression.<sup>74</sup> This sort of feminist critique of mainstream development recognizes that "intermeshing" repressive processes occur in and between households, communities, markets, and states; it does not singularly invest any of them with the power to improve lives.<sup>75</sup>

Transnational feminist governmentalities (TFGs) emerged most powerfully in the 1980s, facilitated by various U.N. and other global governance and global civil-society organizations. TFGs rely on comparative statistical practices and underplay significant power and resource differentials among people in the world and more equitable relations and distributions. Grewal argues that the now normalized "women's rights as human rights" narrative and the focus on women as objects of development by many organizations are what Foucault calls "regimes of truth" that move through various transnational connectivities and produce new subjectivities, hierarchies, and subjugation.<sup>76</sup> For example, at the same time that transnational feminist governmentalities construct a global population of women with shared interests, they discursively divide women into those who are ethical and free and those who are not, facilitating projects to "rescue" and "liberate" putatively unfree women.<sup>77</sup>

Even when global feminist narratives were anti-imperial, anticolonial, and antiracist, Grewal found that they often ignored "historical contingency and context, addressing difference solely within a notion of nonconflictual pluralism or even beyond relativism to a narrative of oppressions that could easily fit into a common framework [in which all women fit] rather than disrupting it."<sup>78</sup> In addition to essentializing women's and men's "natures," transnational feminist governmental processes authenticate the suffering and deprivation imposed by postcolonial, rather than Western, state regimes; normalize the rise of neoliberal market globalization and militarized humanitarianism, which are

posited as concerned with rights, freedoms, and citizenship; and help to “manage” the continuing crisis of growing inequalities worldwide.<sup>79</sup>

Naheed Gina Aaftaab has shown how the post-9/11 U.S. attack on Afghanistan was discursively facilitated by representations of “Afghan women” as a “flattened trope that overlooks the contradictions and complexities in global power relations, and it was used to justify a masculine narrative that shows the United States to be the savior of the powerless women under the Taliban.”<sup>80</sup> Aaftaab further argues that dominant “gender development theories,” articulated most influentially by the UNDP in its human development reports, also “support and strengthen the justifications of [military] violence” against Afghans.<sup>81</sup> In these HDRs, as noted previously, states are evaluated on their success in providing women with more individual “choices” that “build” their “human capabilities,” thus allowing them to overcome “adversities” and increase their potential for living “the good life.”<sup>82</sup> Aaftaab argues that such assumptions and their attached measures draw on “liberal development, democratic governance, and capitalist individualisms” to form “a powerful trinity that support[s] current power structures, though through dynamic methods.”<sup>83</sup>

In criticizing the AHDR framework and the HDRs on a more broad scale, I am bypassing the debate among philosophers, anthropologists, and others as to whether “universalism is ethnocentric,” as Seyla Benhabib has asked in her advocacy for the development of “cosmopolitan legal norms” with respect to human rights, including women’s rights.<sup>84</sup> I agree with Benhabib and other postcolonial feminist scholars coming from a range of theoretical orientations that constructions of East and West as mutually exclusive, “hermetically sealed,” pure, or univocal in their ethical or cultural orientations are the anxious and sometimes strategically deployed myths of Westerners and Easterners who often have shallow knowledge of histories, theoretical frameworks, and practices not their own or who simply want to resist transformations that require them to give up some of their power and resources.<sup>85</sup> I disagree with Benhabib, however, as to the potential of global civil society.<sup>86</sup>

The process of at once globalizing women and comparatively situating their status in different nation–states within a hierarchical configuration is not distant from the subjugating grids of colonial and modernization projects. Such *indexing* relies on generalizations often inadvertently reproduced in the *AHDR 2005*, including that Arab women are automatically victims of patriarchy, culture, and men, with women from certain social groups—bedouin communities, villages, squatter settlements, and poor women in general—highlighted as particularly marginalized.<sup>87</sup> At some points, and in keeping with philosophy of the HDRs, such women are assumed to be lacking in the knowledge to free themselves, escape, or imagine a different future; thus they need rescue.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the *AHDR 2005* too often represents poor women as too poor, illiterate, and otherwise subjugated to conceptualize rights and recognize themselves in individual terms.<sup>89</sup>

ARAB CULTURE IN THE *ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*  
*REPORT 2005*

In his assessment of the *AHDR 2003*, Lavergne notes the “anachronistic” treatment of “Arab culture,” which he argues is often essentialized and treated in “fixed” and

“a-historical” terms.<sup>90</sup> The *AHDR 2005* also suffers from various reifications of Arab culture. This includes an essentializing perspective on familial affiliations, broadly defined, which are often constructed as backward, static, and unchanging<sup>91</sup> rather than imbricated in and often reinvented through other political, social, and economic landscapes. Family relations are represented in the report as “governed by the father’s authority over his children and the husband’s over his wife, under the sway of the patriarchal order.” However, as evidence of the report’s contradictions, the authors note that “the Arab family” is “too complex to be summed up in one generalised and absolute characterisation.”<sup>92</sup>

The *AHDR 2005* often treats Arab societies as exceptionally patriarchal. Postcolonial Arab states, the report contends, have a “symbiotic relationship” with patriarchy.<sup>93</sup> Rather than recognizing how patriarchal ideologies, broadly defined, are context produced, plural, and mutating, the *AHDR 2005* relies on the essentialist idea of an “inner,” distinctly Arab genealogical line that connects “primitive forms” of patriarchy with contemporary forms, following Hisham Sharabi’s influential theory of “neopatriarchy.”<sup>94</sup> For example, Islam’s encouragement of establishing a community (*umma*) that challenged tribal affiliations is ahistorically juxtaposed against the continued existence of “Arab tribes” who have “preserved their authoritarian structures unchanged.”<sup>95</sup> In a similar vein, Arab legislative sexism is explained to be the result of tribalism<sup>96</sup> rather than evidence of male-dominated institutions that favor the legal interests of men, just as predominantly Western institutions privilege Western interests and so on.

Unaddressed in the *AHDR 2005* is how colonial, imperial, and capitalist styles of intervention (often of the divide-and-rule variety) into the affairs of particular localities, industries, and states have required, coproduced, and empowered modern patriarchies. In the contemporary period, Western economic and political leaders regularly deploy patriarchal methods to install, reinforce, or support agreeable sovereigns. Present-day Iraq, where many apparatuses of the U.S. government have constituted and empowered “tribal” structures in order to contain resistance, is only one example of these methods.<sup>97</sup> These sovereigns/fathers are expected to rule resistant populations and control resources in their bounded territories in return for payment or other support. Failure to be an amenable or successful sovereign often results in various economic and military punishments from more powerful countries. These Western practices *do not simply reflect indigenous* patriarchal values. Rather, they constitute and revive them in the face of indigenous challenges of various sorts.

Lavergne contends that the *AHDR 2003* often juxtaposes, without clearly defining, constructs such as “tradition/al” and “modern/ity,” thus undermining the dynamic, hybrid, and pluralistic nature of Arab societies historically.<sup>98</sup> In such a construct, “backwardness” is associated with “tradition,” misrecognizing the degree to which study and knowledge (the focus of the 2003 report) are highly respected, even among the uneducated in the region.<sup>99</sup> A dichotomy of modernity versus tradition is regularly reinforced in the *AHDR 2005* as well. Modernity is associated with innovation, individuality, and openness, and tradition evokes conformity, collectivism, impermeability, and religious subjectivity.<sup>100</sup> For example, one claim in the report constructs “large social sectors” as “still remain[ing] closer to tradition than to innovation,”<sup>101</sup> ignoring the dynamism and complexity, even beauty, of many cultural values and practices in the region. In another example, the report

contrasts “conservative [Arabic satellite] channels” that provide religious programming with “numerous channels that claim modernity [but] in fact project a demeaning portrayal of women, seen mainly as physical bodies and mere commodities.”<sup>102</sup> However, the objectification and commodification of women and sexuality more generally are the bread and butter of modern capitalism and difficult to define as traditional.

“Tradition” and “backwardness” seem to be associated with religiosity in the report, as has occurred in previous AHDRs.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the 2005 report often constructs religious subjectivities as closed and unitary rather than dynamic and plurally experienced, although it attempts to distinguish between practices associated with “custom” and “culture” (such as female clitoridectomy) on the one hand—which are viewed as retrograde, patriarchal, and resistant to change—and “pure religion”<sup>104</sup> on the other. The goal is too often the “liberation” of Arab women from the suffering caused by “custom,” “tradition,” or “conservative tradition.”<sup>105</sup> Defining tradition and modernity in oppositional terms makes it difficult to recognize the dynamism of many traditions and innovations that mobilize “tradition” in strategic or selective terms. To further illustrate the problematic of this binary, modern science is represented in the report as necessary to “restrict the scope of conservative thinking, traditional knowledge and regressive attitudes”<sup>106</sup> despite the fact that science and social science also produce knowledge and ways of organizing the world that facilitate and legitimate social inequality.<sup>107</sup> In sum, the *AHDR 2005* indicates little recognition of modernizing agendas as sometimes accompanied by their own types of repression and violence.<sup>108</sup>

#### EMPOWERMENT AND FREEDOM IN THE *AHDR 2005*

As I noted previously, the *AHDR 2005* relies on an underlying discursive formation—shared with most internationally oriented projects focused on “women’s development” or “empowerment”—that constitutes women as a unitary *victimized* population in global, regional, cultural, or national terms. Such a discourse elides differences among women, so problems they may face are treated as epiphenomenal results of their gender.

Using a global gender discourse to explain and posit solutions for women’s “underdevelopment,” moreover, situates the analytical lens on “local” cultural practices, values, and beliefs, which are often homogenized, treated ahistorically, and assumed to be static in the *AHDR 2005*. This global gender discourse underestimates the extent to which foreign and Western interests in Arab and other states are imbricated in constituting a range of inequalities from which they benefit. Such a global discourse of any scale (e.g., focused on “Arab” or “Muslim” women) also normalizes, and thus participates in constituting, boys and men as part of a unitary category existing in fundamental opposition to girls and women. This global gender formation is hegemonic in the *AHDR 2005*, as it is in much Western development discourse, structuring the gathering, framing, and analysis of empirical evidence, even if results at times seem to challenge these assumptions.

In examining the meaning of empowerment, I take seriously Jane L. Parpart, Shirin M. Rai, and Kathleen Staudt’s reasoning that we should worry when such “diverse and contradictory institutions as the World Bank, Oxfam and many more radical

nongovernmental organizations” agree that “empowerment” is an “unquestioned ‘good.’”<sup>109</sup> Empowerment is quite slippery in its deployments and consequences. When empowerment approaches become more successful at destabilizing “established power structures,” Parpart contends, “they will certainly no longer be the darling of *all* participants in the development enterprise.”<sup>110</sup> The *AHDR 2005* is produced within an international development framework that empowers states over people’s lives, avoids frontal challenges to inequality or oppression on any scale, and underestimates the degree to which postcolonial states are often more dependent upon and accountable to the goodwill of more powerful states than to their own citizens. The authors of the *AHDR 2005* indeed contend at one point that “empowerment” is a saturated and contested term and that dominant development agendas have focused on reinforcing individual rather than collective paths to power.<sup>111</sup>

Critics of previous AHDRs have noted a dynamic of ignoring what Mark Levine calls “politics from below,” which in Morocco, for example, “forced the state to devote increasing resources to the welfare of the people.”<sup>112</sup> In his critique of the *AHDR 2004*, Asef Bayat similarly faults the transformation “from above” orientation of the report and the little attention it devotes to social movements in Arab states and territories. The report, Bayat argues, is marked by “distrust of ‘politics from below’” and a “liberal perception of the ‘state’ as the neutral apparatus representing the public interests, a notion deeply embedded in the conceptual paradigms which inform the general vision of the UNDP and World Bank.”<sup>113</sup> Such orientations are logical given the transnational governmentality agendas and assumptions discussed previously. The *AHDR 2005* similarly assumes states to be potential givers and guarantors of rights, distributors of resources, and agents of change. However, as a number of theorists of the state have argued, the longevity of particular regimes or states to a large degree depends on not questioning their naturalness as loci of power and resource control.<sup>114</sup>

The 2005 report approvingly repeats the hegemonic logic of transnational governmentality, in this case represented by the UNDP: national governments, nongovernmental organizations, and other civil-society organizations should work in tandem.<sup>115</sup> The primary focus on state reform assisted by civil-society actors elides other means of transformation, including social movements and revolts of various sorts, although the *AHDR 2005* is contradictory. For example, the authors at one point call for building movements and “historic struggle . . . [against] the current power structure.”<sup>116</sup> They also recognize and applaud movements such as Egypt’s Kifaya, which “openly opposes the President’s reelection and the transfer of power to his son.”<sup>117</sup> The *AHDR 2005* authors even directly challenge the agendas of “[w]omen’s empowerment projects sponsored by Western organisations and support funds” and deem them not threatening to “any political system.” Such women’s empowerment projects, the authors argue,

convert a major issue into a group of small projects with which any non-democratic system can live. In the most extreme cases, they create a type of tension between the Islamist and conservative movements [on the one hand] and the dominant system [on the other]. The system welcomes this tension, if it is contained, because it helps its image internationally and at the same time results in a compromise domestic solution that does not threaten it.<sup>118</sup>

For the most part, however, the *AHDR 2005* recommends that “civil-society organizations” ally with “politically neutral international and U.N. organizations working for women’s achievement.”<sup>119</sup> The *AHDR 2005* exhibits little self-consciousness about the imposed nature of a “women’s empowerment agenda” or increasing the power of national and transnational governance apparatuses that have little accountability. Indeed, at some points,<sup>120</sup> the authors recommend a degree of external or foreign pressure on Arab states on gender issues and seem unconcerned about internal resistance to this.

As noted, the capabilities approach of the UNDP privileges “objective” and universal priorities and measures over locally defined and articulated preferences on the premise that people constructed as targets of development do not necessarily know what they need or may make choices that support the status quo.<sup>121</sup> The *AHDR 2005* often applies this logic to prognostications of development problems and suggested solutions. Despite the ubiquitous notion of freedom in this and previous AHDRs, the report significantly underestimates how differently situated men and women perceive gains and losses differently—and as a result might make choices and have desires that are not legible within the grids and recommendations provided in the AHDR.

Part of the problem is an essentialized understanding of selfhood, including its gendered aspects, as existing outside of or apart from various locations, experiences, and subjectification processes. In such a view, women who might resist proposed empowerment plans are understood as either victims suffering from “false consciousness” or as liberal subjects for whom various obstacles, including “customs” and “habits,” stand in the way of gaining objective freedoms and choices.<sup>122</sup> This may be why the 2005 report does not interrogate why so many women are involved in Salafi, Muslim Brotherhood, or other “traditional” projects perceived by them as empowering and yet not necessarily acknowledged as such within Western development rubrics.

The authors of the 2005 report call for recognition rather than state repression of Islamist activism in Arab public spheres, although with significant hesitation and ambivalence. At certain points, they paint Salafi movements (which construct themselves as harkening to rebuild a Muslim community similar to the one that surrounded the Prophet) as repressive and limiting women to private-sphere gender roles, especially as mothers and wives. In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) is seen to at least support “women’s political rights and [endorse] their inclusion in electoral life.” The *AHDR 2005* authors nevertheless express anxiety regarding the positions of such Islamist “middle-ground” movements toward personal status laws and “the civil and political rights of minority communities.”<sup>123</sup>

Coexisting with such openings is a narrative of Islamist groups as representatives of backwardness or a strictly instrumental view of them as empowered by states to weaken leftist and liberal forces.<sup>124</sup> However, such organizations differ in ideologies, practices, and strategies and change over time. This makes the “Islamist” adjective a feeble basis of distinction from a social-justice or feminist perspective. To be more specific, charges of misogyny, repression, arrogance, lack of transparency, narrow exclusivism, corruption, and other evils could just as well be lodged against a range of non-Islamist movements, parties, and organizations.

In an inset box in the *AHDR 2005*, Heba Ezzat, an Egyptian intellectual and activist, stresses the necessity of serious encounters between indigenous feminists of secular varieties and Islamists, as well as the contemporary challenges of such a dialogue:

[A]t this time, the Islamist discourse remains one of the most important vectors of cultural identity and the collective imagination. It has a powerful presence socially and politically, and its development may turn out to be a pathway to reform. This is a task that is too critical to be left to the Islamists alone. What feminists must understand is that this comprehensive ideology contains within itself the potential for justice and freedom. Such a dialogue cannot take place until the circumstances in which the broad public debate is taking place evolve since the Arab world today does not possess a clear vision for its survival and continuation as a nation, let alone a renaissance. How then can we expect it to attain a unanimous consensus or even a general agreement on women's issues?<sup>125</sup>

In addition to illustrating the plural messages represented in the *AHDR 2005*, this statement challenges unitary and universalistic notions of freedom, empowerment, and development, including of the feminist varieties. Ezzat instead calls for recognition of and mutual engagement with the range of ways people in the region live, identify, and aspire for betterment. Also embedded in her statement is the urgent necessity to transform in Habermasian terms communication spheres and the rules of discourse in the Arab region so that all social sectors can articulate, contest, and debate their needs, priorities, and aspirations. Such transformation is occurring through individual and collective efforts and in spite of a range of repressive forces interested only in imposing their own visions.

#### CONCLUSION

Critical engagement with the assumptions and methodologies of policy projects does not have to occur on their discursive terms. Although freedom and empowerment are important, they are often imagined, defined, and struggled for in ways that are not legible within offered hegemonic frameworks. Freedom and empowerment should be recognized as plural, dialectical, and continuously redefined and creatively (sometimes desperately) forged by people in everyday life and interactions, within and outside existing institutions, and even in language, religion, and art. Policy-level projects interested in freedom and empowerment are meaningless outside a social-justice framework that respects differences, an ethic of fairness, and a recognition that struggles are often necessary and valuable aspects of life.

Although individuals and groups who are disempowered, disfranchised, impoverished, or repressed often want to improve their situations, their aspirations and perspectives rarely parallel the objectives and views of those targeting them for reform. As James Ferguson argues regarding Africans, aspiring to rise according to hierarchies of development should not be understood as an acceptance of racial, cultural, or civilizational rankings of inferiority and superiority. Rather, many Africans aspire to modernity with the understanding that the world is organized in "up and down" terms. To aspire to modernity or development is to want to overcome what is experienced as a lack in economic and political terms in comparison to other people in the world.<sup>126</sup> The

*AHDR 2005*, working within UNDP development frameworks, methods, and categories that are falsely posited as neutral, represents poorly and disrespects, to some degree inevitably, the complexity of people's lives and subjectivities in Arab countries despite the best intentions of its authors. Actual women and men act in a range of ways and make demands sometimes unrecognizable within, or even contrary to, hegemonic development and global feminist frameworks.

## NOTES

*Author's note:* An earlier version of this paper was presented at a February 2007 panel on "Empowering Arab Women? Assessing the Arab Human Development Report" at Columbia University in New York. It was also presented as part of a panel focused on the *AHDR 2005* during the November 2007 meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in Montreal. I am particularly grateful for the analyses, critiques, and suggestions of the interlocutors on these panels—Lila Abu-Lughod, Fida Adely, Heba Ezzat, Islah Jad, and Azza Karam—and the questions and comments of audience members. The careful reviews and suggestions provided by *IJMES* readers, Judith Tucker, and Sylvia Whitman were invaluable. I thank Lila Abu-Lughod for her encouragement and detailed comments. I am also grateful to Amaney Jamal and Khalid Medani for their suggestions as I began research for this essay and to Jeff Dillman for his assistance.

<sup>1</sup>United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* (New York: Regional Bureau of Arab States, cosponsored with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Organizations, 2006). Please see the overview published in this issue. Lila Abu-Lughod, Frances S. Hasso, and Fida J. Adely contributed to the following background note.

The *AHDR 2005*, published online in Arabic and English in December 2006, is the last volume in a four-part series focused on development in Arab-identified states and territories. A research and policy document as well as visionary political statement, this 230-page report (plus eighty pages of charts, statistics, and references) was produced over several years through the research, writing, and editing of over seventy-five individuals from the Arab world, including some of its most prominent social researchers and feminists.

In the 1980s, after a decades-long emphasis on economic growth as the primary engine for development, a number of prominent economists and development practitioners heralded a new era in the conceptualization of development as primarily a human endeavor with improved life chances and quality of life as the proper end. Thus was coined the term "human development," followed by subsequent efforts to delineate the essential dimensions of human development and the appropriate measures of a development endeavor that no longer had "growth" (and, more narrowly, increased income) as its primary indicator but now sought to measure human ends, capabilities, and opportunities. The global human development report, launched by the UNDP in 1990, put forth new measures in the form of a human development index for capturing this vision. This initial report was followed annually by a new global human development report, each new release grappling with a new dimension of human development, with topics ranging from gender to democracy to technology and human rights. The UNDP's Human Development Report Office maintains a website (<http://hdr.undp.org/>) with information about the global reports as well as national human development reports that have been developed by select countries.

The AHDRs were produced under the auspices of and governed by the UNDP. The first, the *AHDR 2002*, presents and comparatively analyzes various indicators in Arab states and highlights three major "deficits" hindering human development that are addressed in depth in the volumes that follow: "Building a Knowledge Society" (2003), "Towards Freedom in the Arab World" (2004), and "Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World" (2005).

<sup>2</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 24, 231.

<sup>3</sup>Marc Lavergne, "The 2003 Arab Human Development Report: A Critical Approach," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2004): 21; Asef Bayat, "Transforming the Arab World: The *Arab Human Development Report* and the Politics of Change," *Development and Change* 36 (2005): 1230.

<sup>4</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, i–ii.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 55, n. 1. Also important with respect to translation and term choices is that the Arabic subtitle of the *AHDR 2005* is closer in English translation to “Toward the Renaissance of the Woman in the Arab Nation” (*naḥwa nuḥūd al-marʾa fī al-waṭan al-ʿArabī*), reinforcing a singular, albeit familiar notion of “woman” (à la Qasim Amin’s famous text) rather than conceptualizing women in the plural. The word *waṭan* in the Arabic title of the *AHDR 2005* reinforces classic Pan-Arab nationalist formulations rather than a regional grouping of states. The Arabic and English titles, however, also challenge a simply Arab nationalist framing by articulating a focus on woman or women *in* the Arab nation or world rather than (the) *Arab* woman or women per se. This orientation provides a fissure that allows one to consider (even if the report only occasionally does so) women citizens of other ethnicities and non-Arab women of various socioeconomic backgrounds and nationalities who are laborers in the region. These discursive framings and translations hint at the contradictory agendas in the *AHDR 2005* and reveal some of the assumptions examined in this essay.

<sup>6</sup>Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 22–24, 34.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>8</sup>Brigitte Dumortier, “Some Aspects of the Arab Human Development Report 2003 as Read by a European Scholar,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2004): 45.

<sup>9</sup>Such regional development agreements may very well require broader, plural, and more geographically pragmatic frameworks that, for example, include India, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan with Arab states in Asia Minor; sub-Saharan African countries in regional agreements with North African countries; and southern European states in agreements with other Mediterranean countries.

<sup>10</sup>Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 21, 26.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 21; Sami E. Baroudi, “The 2002 Arab Human Development Report: Implications for Democracy,” *Middle East Policy* XI (2004): 136.

<sup>12</sup>Baroudi, “The 2002 Arab Human Development Report,” 136; Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 29.

<sup>13</sup>Mark Levine, “The UN Arab Human Development Report: A Critique,” *Middle East Report Online*, July 2002, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero072602.html> (accessed 1 January 2007).

<sup>14</sup>Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 33.

<sup>15</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 4, 39, 40–41.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 5, 40, 38–48.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 3, 34.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 4, 49.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>20</sup>Baroudi, “The 2002 Arab Human Development Report,” 133.

<sup>21</sup>Dumortier, “Some Aspects of the Arab Human Development Report 2003,” 42.

<sup>22</sup>Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 26; Bayat, “Transforming the Arab World,” 1235.

<sup>23</sup>Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 26.

<sup>24</sup>Bayat, “Transforming the Arab World,” 1231.

<sup>25</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 168.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 20, 92, 201, 202.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 65–66.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>31</sup>For further discussion of *AHDR 2005* assumptions regarding women’s education, see Fida Adely, “Educating Women for Development: The *Arab Human Development Report 2005* and the Problem with Women’s Choices,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009): 105–122 (this issue).

<sup>32</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 189.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 19, 173, 189–91, 194–95.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 194–95.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 195–96.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., iv, 17–18, 180–82.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 1, 28–29, 129, 222–23.

<sup>40</sup>Lila Abu-Lughod, "Dialects of Women's Empowerment: The International Circuitry of the *Arab Human Development Report 2005*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009): 83–103 (this issue).

<sup>41</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 191.

<sup>42</sup>Shaheen Sardar Ali, "Women's Rights, CEDAW and International Human Rights Debates," in *Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/Local World*, ed. Jane L. Parpart, Shirin M. Rai, and Kathleen Staudt (London: Routledge, 2002), 64–65.

<sup>43</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 42.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 18, 184–85, 205–206.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 2, 32, 212.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 22, 64.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 6, 212.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 6, 61.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 6, 12, 126, 134–36, 177, 190, 193–94, 196.

<sup>51</sup>Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminisms* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>52</sup>See, for example, UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 114, box 4–1, 115, and 116–17 for discussion of the "world problem" of violence against women and how it must be opposed in the Arab world. Biopolitics refers to the type of power, produced by a range of modern institutions, that "exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations." Michel Foucault argues that biopower at once individualizes and specifies bodies, depends on fields of knowledge that observe the "political practices and economics" of populations, and is ultimately concerned with "achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" to serve a variety of goals, not least of which is capitalist accumulation. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. I* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 137, 139, 140–41.

<sup>53</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, iv, 10, 31.

<sup>54</sup>UNDP website, "Human Development Reports: Composite Indices—HDI and beyond," <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/> (accessed 29 March 2008).

<sup>55</sup>Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, "Introduction," in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1–2, a study prepared for the World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University. For a fuller discussion of the capabilities approach and the evolution and methodologies of the HDI, see Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A. K. Shiva Kumar, eds., *Readings in Human Development: Concepts, Measures and Policies for a Development Paradigm* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2003), prepared for the Human Development Report Office, UNDP, New York.

<sup>56</sup>Amartya Sen, "Capability and Well-Being," in *The Quality of Life*, 30. The HDI was later "disaggregated" to treat different groups in a country as if they were "a separate country" in order to measure differential access based on various axes. UNDP website, "Human Development Reports: Composite Indices—HDI and beyond."

<sup>57</sup>Gina Naheed Aaftaab, "(Re)Defining Public Spaces through Developmental Education for Afghan Women," in *Geographies of Muslim Women: Gender, Religion, and Space*, ed. Ghazi-Walid Falah and Caroline Nagel (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 48.

<sup>58</sup>Jane L. Parpart, Shirin M. Rai, and Kathleen Staudt, "Rethinking Em(power)ment, Gender and Development: An Introduction," in *Rethinking Empowerment*, 9.

<sup>59</sup>These changes largely impact the development ratings of oil-producing wealthy Arab Gulf states, whose citizens fare relatively well according to the HDI. UNDP, *AHDR* website, "A New Way to Measure Human Development," <http://www.undp.org/arabstates/presskit2002e.shtml> (accessed 29 March 2008).

<sup>60</sup>Nussbaum and Sen, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.* On the issue of people's desires "in large part [being] formed by the circumstances and options that they perceive as being open to them," also see Julia Annas, "Women and the Quality of Life: Two Norms or One?," in *The Quality of Life*, 282.

<sup>62</sup>In this account, these shared "features of humanness" exist in every culture, "whether or not they are in fact recognized [by local people] in local traditions." Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," in *The Quality of Life*, 243, 250.

<sup>63</sup>UNDP website, "Human Development Reports: Measuring Inequality: Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)," [http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/gdi\\_gem/](http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/gdi_gem/) (accessed 29 March 2008).

<sup>64</sup>AHDR 2005, table A4–20, 306.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid. and table A4–19, 305.

<sup>66</sup>Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 134, 136.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, ed. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006), 134, 131–43, 140.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 8; Timothy Mitchell, "State, Economy, and the State Effect," in *The Anthropology of the State*, 170, 175–76; Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," in *The Anthropology of the State*, 113–14.

<sup>70</sup>James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, "Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality," in *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 105–31.

<sup>71</sup>UNDP website, "A World of Development Experience," <http://www.undp.org/about/> (accessed 27 March 2008).

<sup>72</sup>Ferguson and Gupta, "Spatializing States." Critics of transnational governmentalities, many of whom are interested in the systematic and organized ways in which groups in the global South are impoverished, subordinated, or otherwise deprived, argue that states and the situations and conditions of peoples living within them cannot be understood outside of global, regional, and transnational processes and histories, including colonialism and imperialism. Ibid; James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 90, 60.

<sup>73</sup>Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), 9.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 15–16, 18.

<sup>75</sup>Gita Sen and Srilatha Batliwala, "Empowering Women for Reproductive Rights," in *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo*, ed. Harriet B. Presser and Gita Sen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>76</sup>Grewal, *Transnational America*, 125.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 125–26, 133.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 122–23, 133.

<sup>80</sup>Aaftaab, "(Re)Defining Public Spaces," 44.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 47–48.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>84</sup>Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, with Jeremy Waldron, Bonnie Honig, and Will Kymlicka, ed. Robert Post (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). On the issue of "cultural relativity," also see Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues," 260–61; Martha Nussbaum, "Introduction," in *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1, 5, a study prepared for the World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University.

<sup>85</sup>Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, 15–16; Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 24, 25; Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1991); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004); Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>86</sup>Benhabib, *Claims of Culture*, 183–84.

<sup>87</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 10, 118–20.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 118–20.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 119, 221.

<sup>90</sup>Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 22.

<sup>91</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 16, 226.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 16, 17.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 166; Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>95</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 15–16, 165.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 197.

<sup>97</sup>For an excellent analysis of these patriarchal processes in postcolonial Iraq and as they were embedded in international treatment of Iraq in the 1990s, see Jacqueline S. Ismael and Shereen T. Ismael, “Gender and the State in Iraq,” in *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, ed. Suad Joseph (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press 2000), 185–211. The dynamic mobilization of “culture” with respect to gender and sexuality in post-2003 Iraq are discussed in Frances S. Hasso, “‘Culture Knowledge’ and the Violence of Imperialism: Rethinking *The Arab Mind*,” *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (2007), esp. 8–9, <http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/mitejmes/issues/2007sp/CULTURE%20KNOWLEDGE-%20Hasso.pdf> (accessed 28 March 2008).

<sup>98</sup>Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 22.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 25. Indeed, Lavergne found in the *AHDR 2003* evidence of a “deep state of self-contempt by the Arab thinkers themselves” in their focus on the United States as the source for advanced education and in their underestimation of the valuable knowledge and positive orientations toward knowledge that exist in the Arab region. Ibid., 27.

<sup>100</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 17, 151–52, 176.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 17, 174.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 15, 159–60.

<sup>103</sup>See Lavergne, “The 2003 Arab Human Development Report,” 30–31.

<sup>104</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 127, 146–47, 195.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., vii, 17.

<sup>106</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 152.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 149, 150, box 6–5.

<sup>109</sup>Parpart, Rai, and Staudt, “Rethinking Em(power)ment,” 3.

<sup>110</sup>Jane Parpart, “Lessons from the Field: Rethinking Empowerment, Gender and Development from a Post-(Post?) Development Perspective,” in *Feminist Post-Development Thought: Rethinking Modernity, Post-Colonialism and Representation*, ed. Kriemild Saunders (London: Zed Books, 2002), 55.

<sup>111</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 60–61.

<sup>112</sup>Levine, “The UN Arab Human Development Report,” 5.

<sup>113</sup>Bayat, “Transforming the Arab World,” 1234.

<sup>114</sup>Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, “Introduction: Rethinking Theories of the State in an Age of Globalization,” in *The Anthropology of the State*, 1–41.

<sup>115</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, 216.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 222, 226.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 2, 30.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>121</sup>Aaftaab, “(Re)Defining Public Spaces,” 49.

<sup>122</sup>UNDP, *AHDR 2005*, vii.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 21, 29, 99, 127–28, 207–12.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 211, box 9–3.

<sup>126</sup>Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 32.