

# Rahaf Aldoughli

## *Nationalism in the Middle East and Arab Region*

I have strong expertise in the rise of the nation-state in the Middle East, the Syria crisis, militarism, and international relations (IR), the Arab-Israel conflict, terrorism and fundamentalism. My extensive investigation of the national narratives in the Middle East in the 20th century proves the strong influence of European national thought, especially during times of colonialism and post-colonialism. This influence can still be traced in the constitutional and legislative discourses of many Middle East and Arab States.

My research is an in-depth investigation of the intellectual foundations of national thought in the Arab region in general and the Syrian context in particular. Interrogating the early emergence of secular nationalism in the Middle East that has formed the political currents of modern times and contemporary conflicts, I have connected the intellectual contributions of the most prominent Arab nationalist thinkers with the European theorisation of nationalism that emerged in 18th and 19th centuries. At the heart of this intellectual enterprise is an examination of inherent and ingrained masculinist bias. While teasing out this aspect, I enquired about the basis of this prejudice. The masculinist interpretation of nationalism and its dissemination across Arab society is, I argue, a result of the ideological foundations that took place over half a century (from 1920 to 1970). I explored the status of women by investigating the nexus between the constructions of masculinity and nationalism, grounded in the imaginative anticipation of the nation within its nationalist narrative.

However, my research not only investigates the theoretical and ideological aspects of intersected nationalisms (in both the Middle East and Europe); I have also extensively interrogated the construction of gender bias and masculinism in these narratives by deconstructing the formation of national identity and belonging in both the Arab and Syrian contexts. My research in investigating the construction of masculinism in the Middle East encompasses analysis of Constitutions and legislation by highlighting the impact of colonialism on reinforcing gender bias in their discourses.

The research paradigm underlying my research included elements from perspectives of historical and comparative approaches, and critique of ideology. By philosophically engaging with the works of key Ba'athist ideologues, I demonstrate the nature and character of that skewed nationalism. In critically analysing the philosophical origin of nationalism in the writings of Arab intellectuals, the thesis investigates how masculinism is constructed in its narrative, reinforcing boundaries that question national belonging and identity.

The research further investigates the dominance of masculinised national belonging and membership as intimately linked with the normalisation of militarism, which configures men as patriarchal figures and political leaders of the family and the state. As such, my research investigates the philosophical/historical narrative of nationalism in Syria and the Arab region by identifying its national concepts with the early emergence of nationalism in the two universal schools of thought, Germanic and French. This interrogation of the origin of nationalism paved

the way for a systematic analysis of the philosophical theorisations of Arab nationalist thinkers and questioned how women have been constructed in their national ideologies.

Given my Syrian origins, my investigation of the early construction of nationalism in the Arab context in general and the Syrian case in particular has enabled me to deconstruct the writings of the most prominent thinkers in the Arab region, whose work had not previously been translated into English. Having the ability to provide this translation is essential for producing valuable research in the field. The originality of my research also lies in identifying the link between the European conceptualisation of national theories that emerged in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and the formulation of national thought in the Middle East from a gender perspective.

My research also focuses on the rise of nation-states in the Middle East, associating this with the perpetuation of militarism, despotism and fundamentalism. My research analyses militarism in the Arab context not only as an institution used by the state, but also as an ideology that perpetuates masculinity and gender bias. I have also investigated the rise of Islamisation and insurgencies in the aftermath of 2011. Since I am Syrian, my research also examined the construction of gender bias in both the Syrian Constitution and legislation. Deconstructing masculinism in both the constitutional and legislative narrative led me to investigate how the personal status law, based on Sharia law and nationality legislation, has reinforced women's subordination not only in Syria, but also in other Arab states as a result of the French dominance in the region.

Beyond investigating the historical production of national politics in the Arab region, I have a strong research record in Middle Eastern politics, particularly the recent disruption in the Arab region following the events of the Arab Spring. Moreover, my current research entails investigating the role of women in desecularising conflicts in the Middle East by illustrating how sectarian narratives have been used and manipulated from above. I am also interrogating construction of securitization of women by state and non-state actors. I am also working on how to implement transitional justice in Syria through empowering women and activating their voice in the negotiation processes.