The Best of Hard Times: Palestinian Refugee Masculinities in Lebanon. Gustabo Barbosa (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2022). Pp. 360. $80.00 hardcover, $39.95 paper. ISBN: 9780815637233

Samar Kanafani, Independent Researcher, Beirut, Lebanon (samarkanafani@gmail.com)

A significant contribution to the anthropology of masculinity in the MENA region, and to gender, nationalism, and refugee studies more broadly, this book explores how male youth (*shabāb*) come of age as men in Shatila, a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon. It is based on two years (2014–16) of fieldwork in Lebanon and Shatila, where Barbosa resided for one year. Influenced by political economy, post-structuralism, and queer theory, but mostly by Gregory Bateson's systems theory, Barbosa argues that the intersection of exile, institutionalized violence, and nonnormative performances of gender demand an analysis of manhood that defies hegemonic ideals of masculinity. He proposes an approach to gender that is interdisciplinary, intergenerational, linguistic, and materialist, asking: How do Shatila's *shabāb* acquire appropriate sex roles despite their deviation from formerly idealized practices and symbols of manhood?

To address this question, Barbosa uses captivating ethnography and thorough theoretical discussion that stages boundary-pushing debates with and between a range of social science and philosophical literature, not just anthropology. He draws on an impressive array of fieldwork methods: casual conversation, semi-structured interviews, staged dialogues and focus groups, and analysis of musical genres, films, and language. He assumes a deeply empathic and reflexive disposition toward his interlocutors, problematizing the delicate dilemmas of fieldwork politics and honoring the labor needed to do justice to the *shabāb*'s reality and worldviews. Humble and at times humorously self-deprecating about the vulnerability that arises from the ethnographer not knowing, Barbosa maintains openness to learn, and forgiveness toward mutual misunderstanding in the field. In his book, we are acquainted with the dozen or so *shabāb*, in their relationships and exchanges with relatives and friends, and their reflections on their own trajectories, present lives, and aspirations.

Barbosa situates Shatila within the wider sociopolitical context of Beirut and Lebanon, revealing the continuities of the camp with surrounding urban slums and camp populations in other regions of Lebanon, while highlighting Shatila's spatial interface with the Lebanese security regime and its marginality from vital infrastructures of labor and services. The systemic exclusion of Palestinian refugees from the Lebanese job market, and the suppression of their national project to liberate Palestine of Israeli occupation militarily from Lebanese soil, render work, making a family, and armed struggle unattainable channels of masculinity for this generation of refugee youth. He points out that the way a previous generation of refugee men, the *fidāʾiyyīn* or freedom fighters of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), experienced coming of age are tenets of hyper-masculinity that do not apply to the *shabāb* today.

Barbosa therefore critiques the idealized and, in his view, over-theorized concept of "hegemonic masculinity" that considers a shortcoming in male heroism, professional accomplishment, and financial stability as a "crisis of masculinity." This concept, he contends, ignores the ways that the *shabāb* can and do become men, thereby creating a crisis of "gender" as it fails to capture everyday performances and identifications of antiheroic manhood. He argues that a fair and nuanced scholarly understanding of masculinity is better served here by queer theory, which (re)deems a variety of sex roles as possible and appropriate in their nonbinary iterations, indeed in their disinterest in conformity. While struggling to find work, several of the *shabāb* are averse to the prospect of marriage, and while they identify as Palestinian and recognize the injustices of their people's dispossession,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074382300017X Published online by Cambridge University Press

they spurn the legacy of their *fidāʾyī* fathers (and sometimes mothers), who have neither reclaimed their original homeland nor established themselves in a new one.

Basbosa questions the association—so canonical in Euro-American traditions of anthropology and gender studies—of sex with nature and gender with culture, and of gender with hierarchy between men and women, and younger and older men. Rather, he notes that sex is also socially constructed, its performance inherently vulnerable and shifting. He supports this point with one of several evocative linguistic and epistemological explorations. *Jins*, the Arabic for "sex," is broad enough to imply difference of biology as well as of other social categories like "sort," "nation," and "gender." Meanwhile, *gandara*, the coined term for "gender," is part of an imposed humanitarian and liberal feminist lexicon that equates difference with opposition and hierarchy in a context where "sex" is more intersectional.

A theory of gender as binary and hierarchical is especially inadequate in a context where there is no state to mediate the playing fields of power, indeed where men and women, young and old, find themselves collectively powerless and unfree. In what Barbosa terms "anti-state" spaces such as Shatila, rather than citizens' lives and bodies being marginal to the state, the state is itself marginal to the lives and bodies of refugees. Barbosa questions whether gender is at all a useful concept in this instance, advocating for theory that recognizes the *shabāb*'s lives as intrinsically vulnerable on multiple interrelated levels.

The book ends with ethnography on the practice of pigeon herding whereby *shabāb* raise, breed, and grow their flocks, skillfully flying and guiding the birds back to their rooftop coops. Herders surreptitiously covet and attract other herders' pigeons into their own flocks, which provokes serious conflict over theft between herders. Historically popular in many informal urban settings at least in the Levant, pigeon herding continues despite local and state authorities' recent attempts to ban it. For Barbosa this practice is as much a competitive and territorial practice as it is contemplative and liberating; indeed it is an established avenue for *shabāb* to assume their sex roles by succeeding at something attainable while vicariously soaring freely above an otherwise oppressive landscape.

I agree with Barbosa's critique of "hegemonic masculinity" as an inadequate lens through which to fully appreciate the performance of *shabāb* today, in the post-PLO era in Lebanon. Yet he seems to be arguing that the gold standard of heroic, fatherly, bread-winning manhood—even when unattainable—need have no place in everyday or scholarly discussion on masculinity anytime, anywhere. There was a time when the PLO was a pseudo-state in Lebanon, when the Lebanese state sanctioned Palestinian armed struggle against occupation, and when foreign funding made financial stability within reach for Palestinian refugees. For better or worse, idealized tenets of manhood featured in practice and discourse, ideology and art, even when they were voluntarily shunned or became impossible to fulfill.

"Emergent masculinities" in Marcia Inhorn's ethnography on infertile men seeking fertility treatment in Lebanon (2012),[1] and "dislocated masculinities" in Jason Hart's ethnography of male youth living inside Jordan's Palestinian camps (2008),[2] also address the margins of desirable and possible manhoods in contrast with normative ideals. Where in Inhorn and Hart, new and queer performances also ensue from older or more established masculinities, these authors' work defines the limits of hegemony in material, biological, temporal, and spatial terms, without discarding the notion of "hegemonic masculinity" altogether.

I subscribe politically to Barbosa's commitment to tether his analysis to the expressed preoccupations and life possibilities of interlocutors themselves. Yet I am not sure that hegemonic ideals of any sort—formerly or presently problematic—can be wished away so easily. I am left wondering whether Barbosa is throwing out the baby with the bathwater, so to speak, not that I have sympathy for this particular baby. His ethnography illustrates

[1] Marcia C. Inhorn, *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[2] Jason Hart, "Dislocated Masculinity: Adolescence and the Palestinian Nation-in-Exile," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 1 (2008): 64–81.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074382300017X Published online by Cambridge University Press

convincingly enough the need for queering gender and related fields to acknowledge more faithfully the *shabāb*'s coming-of-age experiences and sex roles in general. Yet hegemony (mostly for worse) still comes across as a residual haunting, even in the troubled sentiments of the *shabāb* we come to care for and admire in this book.

doi:10.1017/S002074382300017X

Iran's Experiment with Parliamentary Governance: The Second Majles, 1909–1911

Mangol Bayat (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2020). Pp. 505. $45.00 paper. ISBN: 9780815636861

Reviewed by Vanessa Martin, Emeritus Professor of Middle Eastern History, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, UK (v.martin@rhul.ac.uk)

Iran's Experiment with Parliamentary Governance provides a significant study of the second Majlis (1909–1911) which, until now, has been mentioned in the scholarly literature largely as a postscript to the first or as a mere stage in the ongoing struggles over religion and secularism; foreign power rivalry; encroachment, the policy of extending central control over the provinces; and the failure to implement the Constitution of 1906. The parliamentary period constituted an attempt to impose new political structures, drawn from Europe and based on popular representation, upon an ancient political edifice based on absolute power, which had no means of accommodating them other than by its replacement. Compromise was attempted, but in reality there was little room for it. Provincial, personal, and political divisions hampered reform. The role of foreign interference in this period has been much discussed by scholars, but Bayat places a new emphasis on the role of France, in particular the establishment of the Alliance Française, which contrived to exert influence on the contemporary Iranian political situation through its connection with the Iranian elite, using its links with Freemasonry. The Alliance Française sought to unite its members from different milieus in pursuit of the implementation of reform. Bayat also draws attention to reformist connections with Istanbul before the revolution. There, the Anjuman-i Saʿadat had support from the emerging Young Turk movement, which liaised with Najaf and Baghdad. The revolution, accordingly, emerged from a wider area in the Middle East that embraced similar ideas. The example of the Young Turks encouraged the Iranian reformists to organize, adopt a more moderate program, and so gain wider support.

Established in 1909, a newly elected assembly announced itself as seeking reform and organization, following the example of politically advanced countries while respecting the principles of Islam. However, it immediately began to produce divisions. Taqizadeh, the ardent and eloquent representative from Tabriz, antagonized the more conservative deputies and the clergy and generated opposition from Armenians and Georgians. He also contrived to aggravate the Russians and irritate the French, whose essential interests required order, on the grounds of his radicalism. Eventually, when in 1910 the growing antagonism to different views led to the assassination of a senior cleric, Sayyid Abdollah Behbehani, Taqizadeh was obliged to flee the country. In Bayat's view, there is no evidence that Taqizadeh condoned violence; likewise, she believes that his position was not particularly strengthened by his connection with the British.

Two parties appeared. The first, the Democrats, advanced a program that was based largely on European social democracy. Ardently secular, they sought to curtail the influence