13  
Society and Policymaking

13.1 Introducing broader implications

This final chapter I draw out several implications of this book for societal debates as well as policymaking. First, I go back to the five contemporary and topical issues addressed in the introduction: Islam, modernization, education, globalization, and patriarchy. For these I discuss how the results feed back into these core academic and societal debates and help produce more accurate and nuanced views on our social and political reality (Section 13.2). In Section 13.3, I take it one step further and reflect on existing debates about how to intervene policy-wise. In doing so, I use the framework and results from this book to shed more light on the arenas at which core political struggles are fought out and which processes should be thought through when considering specific policies. A core element of the latter is drawing attention to unexpected and negative side effects, which can only be laid bare using a more holistic framework. At the end of the chapter (Section 13.4), and book as a whole, I once more get back to Khadija, whose story opened this study.

13.2 Contemporary debates

Here, I show how this study informs contemporary debates on Islam, modernization, education, globalization, and patriarchy.

13.2.1 Islam

Regarding the link between Islam and gender equality, there is the civilizationist approach, which I have often criticized in this book. It treats Muslim countries as one homogenous bloc with Islam and gender inequality as identity markers, the former leading to the latter
Conclusions and Discussions

(e.g. Clark et al., 1991; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Ross, 2008; Yuchtman-Yaar & Alkalay, 2007). This tendency to heap together roughly 50 countries might even be stronger among (conservative) politicians and pundits. Emblematic is Hirsi Ali’s (2006: 124) choice in ‘Submission: Part 1’ to introduce the fictitious Muslim-majority, Sharia-ruled ideal-type country ‘Islamistan’ (see Jusová, 2008). The results of this book clearly show empirical diversity: Islamistan does not exist.

However, my more nuanced approach is not to deny the importance of Islam. Islam is important societally and influences women’s employment, as shown by the negative impact of State Islamism, by violence motivated by religion, and by feeding societal norms on employment and people’s role in the household. The implementation of Sharia law is most worrisome here as it showed a clear and strong negative effect, and seems on the rise even though only a small number of these countries had Sharia-based law (see Chapter 2). We already saw that local Sharia law gained ground in Indonesia and Nigeria in the previous decade (see Chapter 9). Current developments such as Nigeria being terrorized by Boko Haram, who want to establish an Islamic state in the North of Nigeria do predict increasing restrictions on women’s movement, and similar voices are relatively strong in post-revolution Egypt and IS-ruled parts of Iraq and Syria. These calls for Sharia law should not be ignored too lightly.

At the same time, Islam is diffuse and contains multiple dimensions. It for instance focusses on gender equality and on socio-economic justice, and more or less pro-equality or pro-empowerment positions can be taken on each dimension. This approach of ‘deconstructing’ religion’s influence resembles a more anthropological and postmodern approach, as both acknowledge the intertwining of religion with local culture, of women’s agency in using Islam to their own advantage, and in the performative aspect of Muslim women’s behaviour (e.g. Jansen, 2004; Johnsdotter, 2003; Freedman, 2004; Ghorashi, 1996; Gruenbaum, 2001; Ketner et al., 2004; Mojab, 2001; Moors, 2004). However, this book stayed away from postmodern or anti-categorical approaches (McCall, 2005; Spierings, 2012) and the risk of overstressing differences and ignoring general patterns. The focus on patterns of diversity here is a less extreme position, which proved useful in showing when Islam influences employment, in what way it does so, and how its influence relates to other forces.

13.2.2 Modernization

The early literature on modernization argued that it has a clear positive influence on women’s employment. The women-in-development