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Book Review: *Political Socialization of Youth: A Palestinian Case Study* by Janette Habashi

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BOOK REVIEW

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF YOUTH: A PALESTINIAN CASE STUDY

BY JANETTE HABASHI

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2017. X + 224 PAGES

\$99.99 (HARDCOVER), \$79.99 (E-BOOK)

ISBN 978-1-137-47523-7

In her book *Political Socialization of Youth: A Palestinian Case Study*, Janette Habashi challenges widespread understanding of political socialization. Projects that promote youth civic engagement are commonplace in countries emerging from conflict. Civic engagement is assumed to increase political participation in formal electoral processes and support the development of competent and responsible citizens. Education systems play an important role in this process. Schools convey knowledge about government structures and electoral processes to children and youth and, as such, provide a framework within which much of their political socialization occurs. The importance of these activities is often said to be heightened in countries experiencing or recovering from conflict, owing to the ways in which civic education can contribute to, or reproduce, the values, politics, or ideologies that can fuel conflict or support peace. However, Habashi challenges this understanding as a top-down Western assumption regarding political agency that does not accurately reflect the depth or scope of young people's political awareness in conflict-affected contexts. She argues instead that youths' political development needs to be understood within a broader ecological framework that accounts for the myriad local and global influences that shape their lives.

Habashi's book is based on a multiyear journaling project with Palestinian youth from the West Bank who were ages 12-15 at the onset of the study. The book is organized around key themes extrapolated from the data using a grounded theory analysis and presented across ten short chapters. This methodology not only allows Habashi to foreground youth voices but, crucially, it also treats youth political socialization as a dynamic and evolving process. Part one of the book examines the different ecological influences that shape youth political socialization, including community, religion, education, and media. The result is a convincing portrayal of youth political agency as a far more present, nuanced, and multifarious set of attitudes and actions than conventional wisdom suggests. Community context, Habashi argues, offers different opportunities for youth to act, which produces a range of outcomes that are variously filtered through social identifiers, including class, gender, and location. Their religious context provides youth with political meaning and insight, albeit in ways that may differ from the

tenets of faith itself. Education, on the other hand, politically socializes youth not only through the curriculum but through structures that reflect and transmit the oppressive realities of the military occupation in which Palestinian youth come of age. Lastly, media influence youth narratives and political discourses through the transmission of mainstream narratives, and via new digital media platforms that provide increased opportunities for young people to react, interact, and express different viewpoints. Throughout her book, Habashi demonstrates youths' astute political understanding of the local and global processes that shape their lives.

A particular strength of the study is its longitudinal approach. This is most evident in part two, which deals with the outcomes of political socialization. It is here that I found Habashi's critique against the dominant understanding of youth political socialization the most compelling. She argues that the status quo excessively emphasizes formal institutions and political processes and thus overlooks the ways in which children and youth actively engage and transform their situation. She shows that youth agency and civic engagement in conflict-affected contexts manifest in alternative forms of political participation that include acts of resistance, activism, and solidarity. This includes actions that outsiders may characterize as deviant, such as stone-throwing, protesting, or boycotting. This important and provocative finding challenges the dominant understanding of civic engagement as linear and necessarily positive. In doing so, it also forces us to question what is meant by related conceptions such as resilience and recovery, which are premised on many of the same underlying assumptions. Habashi shows that youth engage in a wide array of actions and strategies to manage and transform the adversities they live with, and that this variously manifests in outcomes that may be perceived as both adaptive and maladaptive.

Overall, the book is impeccably researched. At times, however, I felt that the extensive secondary literature that was cited in each chapter detracted from the rich youth narratives. It also was sometimes unclear which arguments related to a review of existing research or emerged from the study's primary data. The heavy emphasis on theory could also dissuade some readers whose work would directly benefit from the critiques offered in this book. Still, the book offers important lessons for policymakers and practitioners in the fields of education in emergencies and international development education. It is particularly recommended for those working in chronic crisis and longer-term reconstruction contexts where civic engagement tends to dominate the donor agenda (especially in the post-Arab Spring, Middle Eastern context). One message in particular stands out and bears repeating: the pervasive finding that children are acutely aware of their political environment and the local and global structures that shape their lives,

and that they act on these realities. For many working in our field, this is hardly news, not least for readers familiar with the Palestinian context. The implication of this is worth underscoring, however; namely, interventions that attempt to positively influence children's and youths' political attitudes and actions through education content alone, without addressing the implicit and explicit ways in which education structures and the wider environment reflect and transmit oppression and discrimination, will prove ineffective at best and could do more harm than good.

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