

Kohol Journal's Conference on “Alternative Economies”

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Economists, sociologists and political analysts have been increasingly challenging capitalism and the so-called neoliberal socio-economic paradigm since their notorious impacts on human development and social justice have started to materialize and grow. The anti-capitalism and anti-neoliberal discourses have been particularly remarkable in the Arab region, especially since the outbreak of the Arab uprisings. The case has been similar in the other parts of the globe which are the primary victims to imperialism, authoritarianism, and the consequent uneven development that directly lies behind the wide social discrepancies and the loopholes in the social fabrics.

Knowing that the most vulnerable and marginalized social groups, such as women, children, youth, refugees, people with disabilities and people living in rural and remote areas, are the most affected by the repercussions of the resulting inequality spirals, **Kohol Journal's conference on “Alternative Economies”**, which convened in Beirut on June 21-22, 2019 following their Summer Issue “Organizing Against the Tide: Alternative Economies and Gendered Labor”, came as timely and necessary. It was mostly important to further the exploration of the overlaps between patriarchy and capitalism and to reinitiate a grounded debate on the role/situation of women in the status quo.

Kohol Journal utilized its role - being a young “progressive feminist journal on gender and sexuality in the Middle East, South West Asia, and North Africa Regions” that adopts an open access, open mic, interactive and multilingual model - to bring young scholars and activists from the Arab region and the world together in order to provide them with a space to present their research work and exchange their thoughts and experiences on a wide array of infrequently visited topics which they address from a gender lens. These topics included “labor and migrant domestic work, movement-building and access to resources, the economies of medical patriarchy, and feminists organizing around economic justice”, among others.

The conference presented an innovative approach to means of studying gender discrimination in the prevalent socio-economic paradigm and in the proposed alternatives. It was also an eye-opening process to hear feminists tapping into issues that the majority of feminists and researchers have been blind to; namely challenges that fall under the umbrella of rural feminism and instances that depict the struggles of rural women; which prevent them from making a change and thriving both economically and socially.

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship (AI) at AUB contributed to this special conference with a panel presentation that delved into critiquing neo-liberal policies and norms, while focusing on their impacts on women's rights, among the rights of other

vulnerable social groups, from a social-economic perspective. AI's presentation mainly underlined a case study that is reflective enough of the channels through which neoliberalism accentuates gender discrimination. By speaking about the lack of gender-sensitive public policies, especially the prevailing fiscal policies amid the current socio-economic circumstances of women in the Arab Region, and by highlighting a selection of explicit discriminations against Arab women in various laws and legislations, especially at the level of social protection, inheritance, and access to property legislations, AI researcher Farah Al Shami demonstrated how gender discrimination is embedded in the policies shaping our economic systems and how it is being practiced by the Arab patriarchal authorities and facilitated by the prevailing cultural religious norms in the region. She also stressed how the ingredients, the space, and the attempts to mobilize effectively against this de-facto situation remain limited and insufficient. As development actors have become more aware of and attentive to this viewpoint, nowadays, the featured ideas were received as important food for thought by both policy-oriented activists and researchers mapping and analyzing social movements.