

## **Living as a female school teachers in contemporary Cairo: Rethinking gender in the Middle East from the everyday-life practices**

This research aims at understanding “the lives” of Egyptian female school teachers in Cairo in 00’s. By focusing on their “everyday-life practices”, the research discusses how their lives were lived, and what kind of significance was given to those lives by each woman. This is an attempt of doing ethnography on Egyptian women’s lives based on ‘coevalness’. For achieving the objective, the research portraits three female school teachers comprehensively as people who live in their lives in Cairo in the middle of the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, and tried not to uncritically reproduce the wide-spread understandings of female teachers in Egypt such as successful career women (women who can manage both domestic tasks and professional career), the successful female agent for reproducing good citizens, or under-privileged female university graduates who cannot find proper jobs and forced to suffer with under-paid jobs.

In Egypt, female school teacher is often deployed by various actors to be the ideal way for women to become successful in the public arena. As well as the Egyptian government, both modernists and Islamists considered and stated that school teacher is the most ideal profession for women in the society. As such, female school teachers were picked up by many different studies on women in Egypt. Some considered the overlaps of their job descriptions helps women to become school teachers, namely the child rearing, because it fits to women’s roles, while many others considered their short and regular working hours helps women to be responsible for both tasks at home as well as in the school. Over all, it had been argued that school teacher is a rare occupation which does not contradict to female gender norms in the society. In fact, according to the governmental statistics, close to 80% of all the elementary school teachers were occupied by female. On the other hand, in Egypt, school teacher is often taken by mass-media to be one of the causes of the recent social disruptions with incidents such as school teachers selling exam sheets prior to the exam, school teachers using severe violence in the school, or school teachers engaging private tutoring with their own students. In such contexts, school teachers’ lacking sufficient educational capabilities was said to reflect a major governmental irresponsibility.

Overall, in Egypt, many academic, as well as nonacademic discussions depicted ‘female school teacher’ as a code that reflects modest woman who follow the gender order and familial order, and devote for the national polity, while not much attention had paid for the actual female school teachers themselves.

In order to shed light on “the lives” of female school teachers in Egypt, the research includes

ethnographic descriptions of three school teachers to illustrate their “everyday-life practices,” particularly their way of “fashioning” their selves and how they assessed the result, with rich empirical data. In deploying the concept of “self fashioning”, three ethnographies dig into the realm of meanings and intentions embedded to each everyday-life practice, without losing a sight to discuss a female school teacher as a comprehensive human beings. The data were collected from the field research conducted for 26 months between September 2004 and March 2013. The main data was collected mainly by a participant observation and interview research conducted at a private school in Giza governorate from August 2007 to February 2008, during which the author also worked as a school teacher in the school. In addition, the research further critically discusses a theoretical orientation of the Middle Eastern gender studies, in order to examine the contribution and the limit of the previous discussions and to develop the gender as an analytical concept and save its significance beyond the euro-centric argument of criticizing the local tradition as backwardness or an extreme cultural relativism that often sees “gender as an social system” which denies any social interruption.