country now is: How can Cuba find a way to sustain a cohesive communist system in the future? Newton concludes this chapter by comparing and contrasting the accomplishments and fault lines of these two case studies with a final note that both systems continue to be dynamic rather than static.

This edition of Socialism: A Very Short Introduction is informative and accessible. It will benefit both graduate and undergraduate students in all disciplines, and it would be useful for the Core programs and the general reader.


Embodying Geopolitics is an outstanding comparative study about women’s activism in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Covering five decades from post-independence through the Arab Spring, Nicola Pratt theorizes women’s activism as embodied geopolitics. Theorization is combined with personal interviews with more than 100 women, conducted between 2013 and 2014. Feminist geopolitics focuses on the “embodied dimensions of geopolitical processes, writing the experiences and agency of ordinary women (and men) into international politics,” integrating the personal, the private, and the everyday resistance to power into the domain of international politics (p. 3). Women’s activism, Pratt argues, is more than simple acts of resistance and transgression. It is pluralistic. This brief review will highlight the major findings of the book.

The book comprises seven chapters, with an introduction, a conclusion, and two lists of interviewees and organizations. The introduction lays out Pratt’s theoretical framework. Edward Said’s focus on the relationship between geography and power is Pratt’s point of entry into the theory of geopolitics. He says that the complete struggle over geography / territory/space is not only military, but it is also cultural; colonialism, Empire, and neocolonialism are also about ideas, forms, images, and imaginings (p. 3). The introduction also describes the book’s organizational plan and the chapters’ specific topics. Chapters 1-3 deal with women’s activism from decolonization till the end of the Cold War. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the first two decades after the end of the Cold War; the period after the Uprisings of 2010 onward is explored in chapters 6 and 7. Women’s activism and diverse responses to the contradictory norms constructed by the governments are fleshed out throughout.

Under colonialism, state formation in the colony was not based on the European Westphalian model but on racial difference. All genders—men and women—were
denied citizenship. Colonial discourse further differentiated the “Oriental woman” as “backward” due to veiling and segregation, adding gender to racial difference. In the decolonization era, anti-colonial, nationalist elites, who followed the Western universal model, embraced the colonial “Oriental woman” designation. They sought her liberation by introducing the concept of “new woman” through education and participation in decolonization. This reformulated norm of the “new woman” was self-contradictory, bifurcating the public and private. Women’s activism was encouraged in the public sphere but constrained in the private one. The female body—pure sexuality—was at the heart of this controlling construction by the nationalist male authority.

The postcolonial era and state formation, which continued to be dominated by the global North, offered yet another variant to the construction of gender. While women were becoming more educated and encouraged to participate in state building and legitimation, the “modern-yet-modest” woman was restricted from entering the political arena (p. 10). Chapters 1-3 demonstrate how, in post-independence Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, neocolonial states were complicit with this construct. State feminism was introduced but manipulated to demonstrate a modernist, progressive image. Personal status laws of gender inequality were maintained, despite women’s activism in calling for equal rights and participation in political decision-making.

Scholars have historicized this period as the modern Pan-Arab republics versus the traditional conservative monarchies. Feminist scholarship presented women activists as either participating in the modern anti-colonial struggle or passively victimized by the patriarchal nationalist system that denied equal rights. Pratt challenges this binary. She suggests that, while women were encouraged to engage in the struggle, new constraining norms of “female respectability” were instituted and manipulated by the state (p. 33). Women’s awareness of the contradiction allowed them to also manipulate the system for their own benefits. Interviewees in Egypt and Jordan reveal that, while some women acquiesced for personal, professional development, radical women resisted and sought to exercise their agency. This latter group was subject to repression by the state.

The concept of “female respectability” was carried over into the next historical period, from the 1967 Arab defeat by Israel through the 1980s. Rather than highlighting the decline of Arab nationalism and the weakening of Arab governments, Pratt refocuses on new windows for women the defeat opened. Their activism, especially in connection with the Palestine question, collaborated with emerging leftist anti-government trends and challenged the status quo. Supporting the Palestinian resistance was the most salient activity after ‘67, empowering both refugees and women activists. The student leftist movement in 1970s Egypt aided in politicizing and mobilizing mothers, who in turn protested to free
students-prisoners. It was their hope to overthrow the Sadat regime. But authoritarian governments in all three countries cracked down on activism, employing “female respectability” as a strategy. The US intervention in the region exacerbated the situation by supporting authoritarianism, to sustain stability and the status quo. Pratt tells how women activists in Lebanon had to turn to humanitarian concerns after the conditions of Palestinian refugees worsened, with the 1982 “barbarous” and “ugly” invasion by the Israel (p. 107) and the departure of the Palestinian Liberation Movement (PLO) for Tunis. Of note here are the massacres of Sabra and Shatila by the Christian Maronites, with Israeli soldiers’ support. Trying to rebuild the camps after the Israeli invasion, women humanitarian activists were further obstructed by the “terrible” campaign of terror inflicted by the same Lebanese faction (p. 107).

Three main causes led to the downturn in the region, from the late 1980s: globalization, US hegemony, and NGOs. Pratt adds that 1990s militarization and securitization has negatively impacted women’s and leftist political movements, especially as women’s activism was marginalized and “female respectability” reinscribed. Her nuanced discussion of women’s activism within the complex contemporary geopolitical context of the local and global is evidence of the contradictory, harder path women activists are trying to (re)negotiate.

Embodying Geopolitics by Nicola Pratt is groundbreaking research. Scholars and graduate students will find the author’s extensive scholarship informative and up to date, in the fields of critical geopolitics, postcolonial studies, and feminist scholarship in geopolitics and international relations.


Generations of Dissent is an informative study of dissent in its broadest sense. With no specific translation for the Arabic mu’arada, its usage involves multiple, interconnected meanings of resistance, opposition, and protest, all in one (p. 6). Born out of the particular sociopolitical and cultural milieu of the specific country, dissent is not necessarily democratic nor does it advocate for democracy. Taking their cue from Robert Ivie’s idea, the writers define dissent as an “act of protest, discourse of confrontation, and condition of alienation that is contrasted with consensus or even perceived as a goad to new consensus” (p. 7). Crossing geographical and generic boundaries and covering diverse cultural productions across the