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Gender mainstreaming in the Middle East and North Africa

Can the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the MENA region be explained by sociological institutionalism?

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Gender equality remains a highly discussed topic within international relations. Women are still largely marginalised on social, economic and political levels all over the world. The United Nations (UN) therefore has introduced the method of gender mainstreaming at the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995 with the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality. This gender mainstreaming approach entails the institutionalisation of equality at all policy making levels by incorporating 'gender-sensitive practices and norms in the structure, processes, and environment of public policy' (Daley, 2005, p. 435). This means that a gender perspective is included in the designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluating stages of policy-making. So, before policy, regulations or state programmes are designed, the different effects on policy for men and women is accounted for and taken into consideration at the designing level. The idea is that by doing this, women and men can both benefit equally from government policy and regulations and gender equality is endeavoured.

By 1998, a total of 110 countries have adopted gender mainstreaming in varying degrees which followed with even more countries assigning to the strategy after the millennium (True & Minstrom, 2001, p. 37). The fact that the majority of countries have implemented gender mainstreaming strategies seems to suggest that the world is seriously committed to fight gender inequality. However, looking at the countries that have adopted a degree of gender mainstreaming, it becomes clear that these also include regimes that are known to violate human rights and have conservative attitudes towards women's rights and empowerment. Especially those countries that are located in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) are particular interesting as to why they have adopted gender mainstreaming. Certainly, it could be that these countries are now seriously committed to improving the position of women, but some scepticism arises here. Why is gender mainstreaming applied in a region where women are clearly perceived as inferior and are disadvantaged and discriminated on numerous levels? Are they seriously committed to create a more equality between men and women or do they have ulterior motives?

It seems somewhat counterintuitive that countries who still practise some degree of sharia law – which often places women in a subordinate role – are also committed to improving women's rights. Their commitment is put further in doubt due to the lack of progression in women's rights although some of the countries located in the MENA region have adopted gender mainstreaming almost 20 years ago. Currently, 'women still face multiple challenges,

which restrict their civil liberties, political and economic rights and physical integrity' in several countries located in the Middle East and North Africa (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 56). This leads to the question to whether gender mainstreaming is really an effective strategy for achieving gender equality or whether it is just an empty fashionable method to which states can comply to without enforcement mechanisms or subsequent consequences?

An explanation could be found within sociological institutionalism. Based on the institutionalist argument by Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) it becomes clear that repressive regimes often sign and ratify human rights treaties without the real intention of implementing these treaties. This is attributed to their desire for more state legitimacy and international recognition as well functioning states. Since human rights treaties are perceived as a requirement for good legitimate state behaviour, these repressive regimes sign treaties in order to be seen as legitimate well-functioning states. Perhaps this same logic could also be applied to the adoption of gender mainstreaming by these repressive regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. Therefore the research question of this thesis is: *To what extent can sociological institutionalism explain the adoption of gender mainstreaming policies by repressive regimes in the MENA region?*

This thesis aims at analyzing whether the phenomenon of gender mainstreaming in a region where women are clearly repressed and disadvantaged can be explained by the argument of sociological institutionalism. Additionally, within the literature about gender mainstreaming, there still seems to be a lack of cross-national research (Sainsbury & Bergqvist, 2009, p. 218) and some regions such as the MENA region are still fairly under-researched. Therefore, this thesis also aims at contributing to the gender mainstreaming literature by focusing on a fairly under-researched region.

The subject of this paper will address the UN introduced method of gender mainstreaming to battle gender inequality. It stems from the willingness to give insights in whether gender mainstreaming is really a capable strategy for improving gender equality or whether it is just another fashionable method without clear results. This research functions as a master thesis for the master program Political Science at Leiden University. Following this introduction, chapter two addresses the concept of gender mainstreaming. It will address its definition, how gender mainstreaming can be implemented, what is seen in practice according to the literature and its criticism. Chapter three provides a theoretical explanation of sociological institutionalism. Chapter four is dedicated to the MENA region and whether its occurrence

can be explained by sociological institutionalism. Next a discussion is provided by reviewing the results found in the previous chapter, alternative explanations are given and possible recommendations for further research are mentioned. Finally, a conclusion is added to summarize the main findings and to answer the research question.

Chapter 2 Gender mainstreaming

The term gender mainstreaming (GM) appears to be very straightforward on what it constitutes, however sometimes it is exactly those clear terms that cause confusion about its definition. Therefore, this chapter aims at clarifying the concept gender mainstreaming by addressing its definition, how it is implemented, what is seen in practice and on what grounds it is criticised. By beginning with painting a clear picture of gender mainstreaming it can contribute in the understanding of the general topic of this master thesis.

2.1. Definition

Certainly, there is more than one way to define the concept of gender mainstreaming, but the two most commonly used are those of the United Nations and the European Union. According to the United Nations, gender mainstreaming is defined as '*the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels, and as a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality'* (UN, 2010).

The other definition, from the European Union, states gender mainstreaming as '*the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making'* (Verloo, 2001, p. 2). There is a clear overlap between the two definitions since both see gender as a vital component of government policy which should be included in all stages of designing and implementing state programs and policy. This means that gender or the responsibility for gender equality is not bound to a specific committee or ministry but that the responsibility is shared interdepartmentally and gender equality is addressed within every relevant policy topic. Because of the extensive literature about what gender mainstreaming exactly constitutes, the two definitions have been provided here to give a better insight in the concept. Throughout the thesis the two definitions are used and gender mainstreaming can be understood as incorporating a gender perspective into all stages of policy-making at all government departments.

The concept itself emerged in the 1990s when it moved away from feminist theory and it became to be seen as a policy application for addressing gender inequality (True & Mintrom, 2001, p. 31). It later became the official policy for the United Nations after the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action were it was pinpointed as the new mandate for nation states (True & Mintrom, 2001, p. 31). Although gender mainstreaming may not be a revolutionary new strategy at improving gender equality – since earlier recommendations have been made to integrate gender in all relevant policies – what is new is the fact that since its introduction in 1995 the strategy has received wide political support (Verloo, 2001, p. 5). The result has been that many supranational organisations such as the European Union, the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and many countries have followed this mandate and carry out gender mainstreaming (True, 2010, p. 369).

Regardless of this UN supported mandate, the relevance of focusing on gender is still questioned especially since it is increasingly believed that men and women are treated fairly equal. This may be true to some extent in Western countries, but it certainly does not apply everywhere. Additionally it appears that policy-making tends to be gender-biased. Despite general claims by governments that state policies are gender-neutral, it is often precisely the other way around in where policy-making does not include the different effects policy can have on men and women and keeps favouring unequal gender relations (Verloo, 2001, p. 3). For this reason – gender-biased policies – gender mainstreaming is seen as a suitable strategy to counteract this gender-bias and to create a more balanced relation between the sexes since it aims at transforming and reorganising existing policies and regulations (Verloo, 2001, p. 3).

Gender mainstreaming differs from other perspectives in gender literature such as the equal treatment perspective or the women's perspective. The equal treatment perspective states that differences between men and women are merely created and maintained since the system favours the position of men, which is why according to this perspective women should be ensured the same formal guarantees and rights as men (Mósesdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2005, p. 523). This strategy thus focuses on the sameness between men and women and manifests itself through equal rights legislation and non-discrimination policies (Mósesdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2005, p. 523). However, this strategy completely fails to recognise the special needs and wishes women might have that could completely differ from those of men. Furthermore it believes that the position of women should be made equal to the men's, thus stating that the position of the men is sort of the end-game and what needs to be reached instead of readdressing the unequal system from its foundation.

The women's perspective, on the other hand, also states that society treats men more favourable than women but does acknowledge that there are differences between men and women and that this should be recognized and valued (Mósesdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2005, p. 524). Rather than changing legislation, this strategy tries to create gender equality by using special programs or positive actions such as quota's (Mósesdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2005, p. 525). Again, also this strategy believes that the position of women should be elevated trough special measures to the position of men instead of creating an equal balance between them.

So how does gender mainstreaming differ from these two other perspectives? The gender mainstreaming strategy goes one step further in the sense that it wants to transform society and its gender structures which means that policy-making should be reorganised so that women and men both enjoy equal opportunities (Mósesdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2005, p. 525&526). It sees gender inequality as a structural problem and tries to solve this inequality by 'identifying gender biases in current policies and addressing the impact of these gender biases in the reproduction of gender inequality' (Verloo, 2001, p. 3). Gender mainstreaming aims at institutionalising gender equality by integrating a gender perspective into all stages of the policy process (Daley, 2005, p. 435; Mósesdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2005, p. 521). So the focus is not on making it possible for women to enjoy the same opportunities and rights as men – i.e. elevating the position of women to the position of men – but addressing and creating 'new standards for both men and women' (Mósesdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2005, p. 525).

2.2. Implementation

Some favourable preconditions for implementing gender mainstreaming have been identified based on the Swedish experience. These favourable preconditions are the 'wide diffusion of egalitarian values, the dominance of leftist parties and the dramatic increase of women in elected, appointed and party positions' (Sainsbury & Bergqvist, 2009, p. 119). Obviously these conditions cannot be hold as a deterministic check list for other countries, but do provide insight in what sort of societies gender mainstreaming is most likely to work. The real starting point for implementing gender mainstreaming is conducting gender analysis and making it an integral part of all policy- and decision-making undertakings, meaning that at every step an analysis of gender perspectives must be conducted or taken into account (United Nations, 2002, p. 27). It thus relies on the capacity from gender specialists and governmental institutions to make good assessments about gender and to incorporate this in the analysis (True, 2010, p. 371).

From a global study it appeared that during 1975 and 1998, 110 countries have adopted some form of gender mainstreaming policies (True & Mintrom, 2001, p. 37). From their study, True & Minstrom (2001), found that ‘ 46 made lower-level institutional changes, 22 made lower-level changes but subsequently made higher-level changes, and 42 made higher-level changes from the outset’ (p. 37). The fact that a majority of countries have adopted some degree of gender mainstreaming strategies suggests a relative worldwide commitment to gender equality, or at least an effort to reach a better position for women. Although this seems a positive number at first sight, it does raise some questions about what types of countries have implemented gender mainstreaming and whether they are fully committed to improving women’s rights. What is apparent, however, from this study is that gender mainstreaming can be applied in varying degrees.

According to Daley (2005) three approaches can be identified with a varying degree concerning the implementation of gender mainstreaming throughout state’s institutions (p. 438). First, there is the ‘integrated approach in where gender mainstreaming is employed in a global fashion, whereby responsibility for gender equality is extended to most, if not all, actors involved in public policy and is embedded across various institutions in society’ (Daley, 2005, p. 438). The second approach can be described as ‘mainstreaming light’ where GM practices are institutionalised fairly limited and implementation can be understood as the mere involvement of some government departments or programs (Daley, 2005, p. 438). Although some departments and programs are involved, this approach is still inadequate since not all departments are involved and gender is not mainstreamed enough throughout all institutions. The final approach is where gender mainstreaming practices are implemented very fragmented and only few departments are involved. Here gender mainstreaming is delegated to a specific program and is not a part of the general government policy and therefore its contribution towards improving gender equality is highly questionable (Daley, 2005, p. 439). Moreover, it can be questioned whether this form of gender mainstreaming can actually be classified as gender mainstreaming since it in fact centralizes the responsibility of gender instead of spreading its responsibility over all government deparments.

Regardless of what degree of gender mainstreaming is applied, when a gender mainstreaming strategy is used four stages can be recognised. First the concept of gender mainstreaming is recognised as an official strategy to pursue by ‘embracing the terminology of gender equality and gender mainstreaming (Moser, 2005, p. 567). This is followed by the government accepting gender mainstreaming and includes it in their policy, thereafter; it is implemented in

practice with finally the fourth stage in where the gender mainstreaming policies are evaluated (Moser, 2005, p. 576&577). ‘Examples of gender-mainstreaming initiatives include gender budgets that parallel national budgets and reveal the impact of all government spending on women and men, gender-auditing or -proofing of public policies, and gender-disaggregated statistics that include national census statistics accounting for women's unpaid work’ (True & Mintrom, 2001, p. 33).

But real successful gender mainstreaming depends on ‘explicit institutional commitment and systematic efforts to implemt it’ (United Nations, 2002, p. 27). So although good gender analysis is at the foundation of gender mainstreaming, critical factors for successful gender mainstreaming include the ‘commitment of senior mangement and the establishment of effective accountability mechanisms’ (United Nations, 2002, p. 27). Without serious commitment to the goal of achieving gender equality, according to the United Nations (2002), gender training and programmes are of little use (p.27).

2.3. Criticism

Although gender mainstreaming appears to be a thorough strategy at achieving or at least improving gender equality, it certainly has not come without criticism. It has been called too vague and highly interpretable. There is also, according to Sainsbury and Bergqvist (2009), a lack in transformative results (p. 217). But one of the bigger threats of gender mainstreaming is its decentralisation of responsibility regarding gender equality. Since a gender perspective should be included in all relevant policy issues at all stages – designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – the responsibility no longer belongs to a specific gender committee for example but belongs to everyone’s tasks. The principle that gender equality is everyone’s responsibility has the risk of making nobody feel responsible, causing gender equality to fall from the priority list. This has, for example, happened in the Netherlands where ‘the idea that gender equality should be integrated everywhere had the sad consequence that all gender equality offices were closed, because gender equality was now to be the responsibility of everyone’ (Verloo, 2001, p. 8).

Additionally, gender mainstreaming can also be attributed as being another western-style strategy of achieving gender equality. Implementing gender mainstreaming does assume for some local cultures to become more westernized and adopt their policy and goals, which probably does not completely match with the ideas and norms of those cultures such as within the Middle East and North Africa or the wishes of those women living here (Newsom, et al.,

2011, p. 76). In fact, gender mainstreaming, which can be seen as a global development discourse, has even 'been cited by postcolonial theorists and grassroots organizers as biased against local cultures and the values and ideals of women in those cultures' according to Newsom et al (2011, p.76). If gender mainstreaming is perceived as just another imperialistic way of the Western world to exercise their influence over other parts in the world, it will have no local legitimacy. Without local legitimacy, not only will civil servants be apprehensive of mainstreaming a gender perspective throughout all institutions but society will also not accept is as a legitimate strategy to create gender equality. So how can it effectively improve gender equality if it is perceived as such?

Furthermore, gender mainstreaming is also highly dependable on the will of political actors who can all interpret the concept differently or feel indifferently towards it. (Mósesdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2005, p. 521). This is also stated by Sainsbury and Bergqvist (2009) who say that successful gender mainstreaming does not rely on economic or social power, but it is dependent on political and administrative power (p. 230). Yet again in this line of thought every concept or strategy can be interpreted in more than one way and all strategies are eventually dependent on the willingness to commit of political actors in power.

Without an international control mechanism, it is unclear whether gender mainstreaming is applied in the same manner everywhere. This also makes it unclear whether countries who have stated to have adopted gender mainstreaming are really committed to implementing a gender perspective at all policy levels. Especially the large number of countries that have stated to adopt gender mainstreaming strategies raises the question if all these countries are truly committed to improving gender equality or use it for self-gain. Certainly the wide occurrence of gender mainstreaming increases this assumption. Gender mainstreaming faces the risk, without an control mechanism, of becoming a 'fashionable' strategy to which nation-states comply with on the surface, but in practice have no intention whatsoever of implementing the right measures and institutions to guarantee the effective mainstreaming of gender. Therefore, the next chapter will address sociological institutionalism as a theoretical approach of looking at whether nation-states adopt gender mainstreaming in exchange for self-gain in the form of state legitimacy.

Chapter 3 Theory section

As mentioned earlier, gender mainstreaming is a globally determined strategy for improving gender equality by including a gender perspective in policy-making. Since it is such an elaborate and extensive strategy – all stages of policy-making at all government departments should include a gender perspective – it does require serious commitment to gender equality and improving the position of women in society. However, there are also countries who have adopted this strategy from whom it is unclear whether they are really committed to this cause or use it for self-gain. Particularly fascinating is the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the Middle East and North Africa, especially since most countries still apply sharia law either to personal status and family law or criminal proceedings or both. Alongside official regulation, societal norms are also heavily influenced by sharia law or Islam. The 'pledge' to gender mainstreaming while still having sharia law seems contradicting. An explanation could perhaps be presented by sociological institutionalism and on the claim of Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) that repressive regimes often sign human rights treaties – which is also contradicting – in pursuit for state legitimacy. This argument could maybe also explain the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the MENA region. This chapter therefore explains the basic notion of sociological institutionalism and presents two hypotheses to channel what is expected to be found in the case of the countries located in the Middle East and North Africa.

3.1. Sociological institutionalism

Sociological institutionalism is the result of a group at Stanford University challenging prevailing theories about bureaucracies and organisations that had placed little emphasis on the role of culture within formal bureaucratic organisations since the technical and rational nature of bureaucracies made them culture-neutral (Finnamore, 1996, p. 328). The conventional notion in these prevailing theories – bureaucratic organisations were the best way to cope with organisational problems that presented themselves by intensifying globalisation – was easily countered by the fact that 'bureaucratic organisations have spread even more quickly than the markets and technology that were thought to have created the need for them' (Finnamore, 1996, p. 329). The notion had been that rational decision-making in the form of bureaucratic organisation was the solution for anticipated complex management problems created by globalisation. However, these management problems remained absent, while bureaucratic organisational structures kept on spreading over the world. Or in other words, the world did not develop itself technologically and economically fast enough,

compared to the rate the world became bureaucratized which means that, according to Finnamore (1996) their efficiency cannot be the reason for its rapid expansion across the globe (p. 329).

Meyer and colleagues presented an alternative explanation and placed emphasis on the external context or environment in where these bureaucratic organisations exist. According to them 'formal bureaucratic structures did not spread as a result of their functional virtues as efficient coordinators of complex relationships but because the wider environment supports and legitimizes rational bureaucracy as a social good' (Finnamore, 1996, p. 329). This means that their shape is not determined by efficiency but by the social legitimation. So, according to Meyer, external cultural legitimation explains organisational behaviour and not task demands or functional needs (Finnamore, 1996, p.330). Thus bureaucratic structures are given value and significance because the world has determined it as the most important way of organising affairs. In fact, bureaucratic organisation is so exalted that it has been extended to the political entity in where 'the modern bureaucratic state has become the sole legitimate form of political organisation in the world; virtually all other forms – e.g. empires, colonies or feudal arrangements – have been eliminated' (Finnamore, 1996, p. 132).

World culture

The external context in this approach can be understood as a world culture which produces cultural norms 'that define legitimate or desirable goals for its actors – states, organisations and individuals – which results in organisational and behavioural similarities across the globe' (Finnamore, 1996, p. 326). A world culture can thus be seen as a sort of dominant discourse which prescribes the right behaviour for its actors. Expanding interconnectedness due to globalisation has resulted in the increasing importance of these world models that shape states and societies (Meyer, et al., 1997, p. 145). World cultural norms are ubiquitously present since they 'shape the structures and policies of nation-states in virtually all domains of rationalised life – business, politics, education, medicine, family and religion' (Meyer, et al., 1997, p. 145). Because world culture takes place on all levels, the local context cannot be understood without grasping this external context where it is always embedded in (Finnamore, 1996, p. 30). Additionally, the world model is based on a universalistic claim, meaning that it is applicable everywhere, with general consensus-based legitimising concepts such as citizenship, socioeconomic development and rationalised justice on which nation-states often organise and legitimate themselves (Meyer, et al., 1997, p. 148). The cultural norms within

the world model are not only congruent but also mutually reinforcing, almost to the point that they are taking for granted (Finnamore, 1996, p. 343). This suggests slightly that it is so natural for nation-states to comply to these norms, that the implementation or evaluation is perhaps somewhat overlooked by the international community.

Nation-states

There is intense value attached to statehood which is shown by how the West has imposed the structure of the nation-state all over the world, irrespective of the fact that it can also produce highly ineffective or failed states (Finnamore, 1996, p. 332). According to Finnamore (1996), nation-states are valued as such not because 'they are good at what they supposed to do provide (security, economic growth, promote equality)' but because their organisational structure has the external cultural legitimation (p. 332). This extreme value to statehood also means that self-determination is based on being a nation-state, resulting in the assumption that without the structure of a nation-state, you are of no significance within the world (Finnamore, 1996, p. 332).

Since 'world culture is highly rationalised and universalistic, nation-states form rationalised actor and express themselves as such both internally through constitutions and externally through participation in the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies' (Meyer, et al., 1997, p. 153). They also actively try to maintain this image of a rational actor through decoupling between purposes and intentions but also by claiming classical statehood features such as 'territorial boundaries and a demarcated population; sovereign authority, self-determination, and responsibility; standardized purposes like collective development, social justice, and the protection of individual rights; authoritative, law-based control systems; clear possession of resources such as natural and mineral wealth and a labour force; and policy technologies for the rational means ends accomplishment of goals' (Meyer, et al., 1997, p. 153).

Alongside this extreme value to statehood, world culture also produces requirements that states need to fulfil and adherence to these requirements is perceived as good state behaviour. Examples of such requirements are for example democracy, free elections, a free-market based economy, environmentalism and respecting human rights. The participation in international organisations or supranational bodies stimulates the adherence of nation-states to world cultural norms, since this participation is perceived as necessary and appropriate (Finnamore, 1996, p. 338). By establishing legitimate and desirable goals, world cultural

norms lead to isomorphic outcomes in where states are becoming more and more alike, not only in their organisational structure but also in their ambitions. Examples of isomorphic outcomes as a result of some world cultural norms are: 'constitutional forms emphasizing both state power and individual rights, mass schooling systems organised around a fairly standard curriculum, expanded human rights, expansive environmental politics and formally equalised female status and rights' (Meyer, et al., 1997, p. 152&153).

It is important to understand that despite the fact that similar structures in organisational forms are created by a global world model, differences in behaviour do still occur as Finnamore (1996) illustrates with the example of the United States and Botswana (p. 342). Both countries might be organised in the same way – sovereign nation-state – their internal behaviour can still be quite different. This means that although world cultural norms may create similar patterns and leads nations to certain behaviour; it does not necessarily lead to homogenous outcomes (Finnamore, 1996, p. 342).

However, the universalistic nature of world models may not always be necessarily helpful. Despite that world culture is described in terms of 'the way things work', Meyer et al. (1997) also claim that it can clash with practical experience in reality (p. 149). For instance, formal education is viewed as a cultural norm that has to be organised everywhere, and often in the same manner (primary, secondary and tertiary). Formal education is legitimised by the fact that it is supposed to contribute in economic growth, leads to innovation and provides a general development for the individual (Meyer et al. 1997, p. 149). Besides the shown weak relationship between formal education and economic growth, one can also ask whether standardized education programmes without regard for local circumstances are useful in cases where future farmers for example learn about mathematical problem (Meyer, et al., 1997, p. 149). Not that education is not important, but one can question its contribution when it is shaped in a globally applicable standardized way instead of taken into account local customs and usefulness for children.

Instead of analysing what might best work within the local context, world cultural norms are without question adopted and implemented. It turns out that citizens' rights established in national constitutions are often based on the ideology of other national constitutions drafted at that same time instead of basing it on local conditions and circumstances (Finnamore, 1996, p. 335). This means that 'whether or not a state codifies suffrage for women for example has little to do with the status of women in a state, but is has a great deal to do with international

cultural norms about women's suffrage at the time the constitution was written' (Finnamore, 1996, p. 335). Although this could also have the positive effect that countries were the status of women is insufficient might adopt more women-friendly legislation because of the dominant discourse about women's rights at that moment. But if this is not grounded within local legitimacy, it is likely to be an empty gesture without the capacity of transformative change.

3.2. Human rights treaties

As described before, with the external legitimation of nation-states also comes globally accepted norms and characteristics that nation-states have to comply to. One of such desirable characteristics is respecting human rights. In fact, 'human rights are among the most legitimate standards in the world, subscribing to them has great legitimating value for nation-states and gains them legitimacy in the eyes of superior sovereigns, peers, internal and external competitors, and internal subordinate groups and interests (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 116).

Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) found, in their research, that that most nation-states in the world – including the world's most repressive regimes – have signed and ratified human rights treaties such as the ICCPR, CEDAW, the ICESCR, CRC and the CERD (p.19).[1] Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) question why repressive regimes have sometimes ratified more human rights treaties than countries with a more liberal nature who are usually more in line with the practice of respecting human rights (p.19). This does indeed appears to be counterintuitive. Repressive regimes, as the names suggest, are known for repressing their population in order to maintain absolute authority. So why would they sign and ratify human rights treaties that forces them to respect the individual and its rights? This is combined with the fact that by signing and ratifying treaties countries can be held accountable for the behaviour towards their population. It seems paradoxical for nation-states that want to exercise absolute authority over their citizens to sign treaties that give their citizens the possibility to hold their government accountable for their repressive behaviour (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 119).

Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) provide an explanation based on the institutionalist approach in sociology of, among others, Meyer et al. (1997). They claim that despite the development of a global human rights regime, deriving from the institutionalisation of human rights as a global

[1] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

cultural norm, the result has been non-conformity and high variations in practice (p. 121). Sociological institutionalism claims that 'states follow global scripts in their search for legitimacy in international society and adopt globally legitimated policies and political structures somewhat independent of local environments' (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 121). And since most states desire external legitimacy, most state will comply with globally accepted norms. Human rights treaties or gender mainstreaming can be seen as examples of these globally legitimated policies that give legitimacy to sovereign nation-states.

Global scripts lead to isomorphic outcomes that, when something is considered as appropriate state behaviour, most or all states comply with this prescribed appropriate behaviour. Human rights treaties can be understood as an example of globally legitimated policy – and thus appropriate state behaviour – leading to the isomorphic result ratification of human rights treaties by a majority of nation-states (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 121). Although gender equality has only recently become an appropriate policy for states to pursue, the fact that the majority of states have adopted gender mainstreaming (True & Mintrom, 2001, p. 37), clearly suggests that this strategy is also becoming a globally legitimated policy.

Although this may seem as a positive thing, most of the states signing human rights treaties and thereby presumable committing themselves to the protection of human rights, Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) have also noticed that not all states have the intention of adhering to these treaties especially those states of repressive nature. This can be attributed to the fact that there is a low level of enforcement and no efficient mechanism that monitors whether there is substantial implementation, meaning that there are few consequences connected to not complying with the human rights treaties (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 116.) According to sociological institutionalist theory this can be attributed to the capability of decoupling. Nations-states effectively decouple between the purpose of the treaty and their intention of implementation (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 123). Additionally, repressive regimes have another incentive to sign and ratify human rights treaties; they are often publically rewarded for doing so (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 123). Furthermore Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) also claim that 'repressive regimes are likely to perceive ratification of human rights treaties as an easy way to deflect criticism about their domestic violations and improve their standing in the international community' (p.123).

3.3 Expectations of the MENA region

Since gender mainstreaming could also be understood as a world cultural norm, the same logic used by Hafner-Burton et a. (2008) of the signing and ratifying human rights treaties can be applied here. According to them, repressive regimes sign and ratify human rights treaties to divert international criticism and gain more state legitimation. Two hypotheses have been created to test whether this argument can also be applied for the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the MENA region.

(i) Authoritarian regimes are more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming, than more democratic regimes are

This hypothesis is formulated based on the notion that authoritarian regimes desire more external legitimacy than their liberal counterparts and are therefore more likely to adopt globally legitimate policies that prescribe such appropriate state behaviour. Additionally, with the relative absence of an international control mechanism there are little costs attached to formally committing to gender mainstreaming, making it fairly easy for repressive regimes to decouple between in the purpose of gender mainstreaming and their intention of implementing it.

On the basis of the Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) article the second hypotheses is formulated: *(ii): Among rights-violating governments, those with greater political autonomy from social input are more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming policies, while those with non-trivial limitations on the sovereign's autonomy are less likely to do so*

Both hypotheses constitute only those regimes located in the Middle East and North Africa. This second hypothesis is based on the notion that repressive regimes that have 'greater political autonomy are less likely to be held accountable for violations of the law while those regimes with less political autonomy face the risk of domestic accountability' (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 124). It is assumed that those countries that do not hold any accountability, will adopt gender mainstreaming strategies to keep up the façade of a legitimate country while not feeling any pressure to implement this. In rights-violating countries where there is some degree of accountability it is assumed less likely to adopt gender mainstreaming policies since presidents can be held accountable for not implementing such strategies. These institutional constraints reduce decoupling between the commitment to international agreements and actual behaviour of governments (Hafner-Burton et al., 2008, p. 132&133). So the general logic

behind this hypothesis is that with greater constraints on a government's authority and decision-making power, the less likely it is to adopt gender mainstreaming.

Although this assumption makes sense, Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) found out that in fact the opposite is true and that countries with a fair degree of public accountability were more likely to commit to human rights conventions (p. 31). They attribute this to a 'cultural or institutional match between democratic principles of accountability and the human rights regime' (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 31). They have named this the democratic effect. This means that when this hypothesis does not hold for gender mainstreaming, this can then perhaps be attributed to this same democratic effect.

Other expectations related to sociological institutionalism and the adoption of gender mainstreaming as a way of receiving more state legitimacy is that beyond formal commitment to the strategy, no real effective measures are put in place to ensure the mainstreaming of gender in all government departments. The absence of real gender mainstreaming measures would confirm the idea that states also adopt the practice for self-gain – state legitimacy – and have in fact no real intention of applying it to their governments.

This chapter has addressed sociological institutionalism which attributes global isomorphic outcomes – wide support for the human rights discourse or gender mainstreaming – to external legitimation that nation-states receive when they behave in certain ways, i.e. signing and ratifying human rights treaties or adopting gender mainstreaming. In the next chapter the findings will be presented and there it is analysed whether these sociological institutionalist argument hold for gender mainstreaming in the Middle East and North Africa

Chapter 4 Middle East and North Africa

The MENA region is not the only region in the world were women still face discrimination and marginalisation, but it is a fairly under-researched region within gender literature focused on gender mainstreaming. This makes the region interesting to look at and where it stands in terms of gender mainstreaming and gender equality. The Middle East and North Africa both have had a turbulent history with instability and violence, especially in the last couple of years instability has increased due to the Arab spring which caused many regime changes in the region. 'Aside from their ancient, rich common cultural heritage and shared history, the MENA countries as a group are also distinct from the rest of the developing world in numerous ways' according to the World Bank, they have relatively 'higher per capita incomes, relatively traditional gender norms, common religious identity for the bulk of the population, legal frameworks that share many common features, economic structures that are characterized and influenced by dominant public sectors, and the majority share of the world's oil reserves'(World Bank, 2013, p. 52). Additionally, most countries located in the region are repressive and have low standards concerning human rights. Women are significantly discriminated on a social, economic and political level and have a somewhat subordinate status in the region due to conservative societal norms and sharia law (Freedom House, 2010, p. 2). Despite the presence of gender-based discrimination, a couple have countries have adopted gender mainstreaming strategies, suggesting that they are committed to improving the position of women. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, repressive regimes have a tendency for complying with international norms without the intention of implementing them in reality.

Since there is no clear definition of the MENA region, this thesis has included those countries that are most often included in definitions of international organisations when addressing the region such as the World Bank and the United Nations. These countries are: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. This chapter presents a clear overview about the region and the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in some countries, it tests the two hypotheses presented in the previous chapter and addresses whether gender mainstreaming is an attempt for repressive regimes in the region to gain more state legitimacy.

4.1. Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is becoming increasingly more noticeable in the Middle East and North Africa region, although it still needs great improvements to ensure that a gender perspective is effectively integrated in all levels of policy making (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 95). Despite a somewhat ineffective application of gender mainstreaming, most countries have reported to use the strategy according to the OECD and CAWTAR (2014, p. 92.). Many challenges, however, still remain since 'most policy processes across the MENA region do not yet have a process for integrating gender considerations in a systematic manner' (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 56).

General overview of the region

On the following page, a table is presented that gives a quick overview of all MENA countries and some variables. Although Palestine also lies within the MENA region, most Western countries have not recognised it as an official state causing many Western based institutions to leave it out in statistical reports. The United Nations Development Programme has no ranking for it on the Gender Inequality Index, similar it has also not been included in the Global Gender Gap Index. Palestine is also not mentioned in the True and Minstrom article (2001) and not included in the polity IV index. Despite this, some gender mainstreaming appears to have been applied according to the OECD/CAWTAR report (2014, p. 75), but with some many variables missing it has not been taken into account for this analysis. The regime types of the included countries have been established by looking at Polity IV categorization. The three part categorisation – democracy, anocracy and autocracy – has been based on a 21-points scale (Polity IV, 2014). Another measurement of Polity IV has been included in the table, namely the executive constraints on the government. This 'refers to the extent of institutionalised constraints on the decision-making powers of chief executives, whether individuals or collectives' (Marshall, et al., 2013, p. 24). This has been included to see the level of decision-making power located at the authority which can affect the adoption of gender mainstreaming assumed by hypothesis two. The level of institutional constraints is measured according to a seven-category scale ranging from: (1) unlimited authority, (2) intermediate category, (3) slight to moderate limitation on executive authority, (4) intermediate category, (5) substantial limitations on executive authority, (6) intermediate category and (7) executive parity or subordination (Marshall, et al., 2013, p. 24&25).

Table 1. Gender mainstreaming in the MENA region

Gender mainstreaming by countries in the MENA region						
Country	**Regime type?** Based on Polity IV scores in the year of GM adoption and/or 2013	**Institutional constraints** Based on Polity IV index in 2010	**Sharia law**	**Gender main-streaming?** [2]	**Gender Inequality Index ranking 2013**[3] (Total:187 countries)	**Global Gender Gap Index 2014**[4] (Total:142 countries)
Algeria	1996: Autocracy 2013: Anocracy	5	Partial	High level (1996)	81	126
Bahrain	Autocracy	2	Partial	Yes[5]	46	124
Egypt	1994: Autocracy 2013: Anocracy	3	Partial	High level (1994)	130	129
Iran	Autocracy	2	Complete	No	109	137
Iraq	Anocracy	4	Complete	No	120	/
Israel	Democracy	7	No sharia law	Low level in 1980 and high level in 1997	17	65
Jordan	1992: Anocracy 2013: Anocracy	3	Partial	Low level (1992)	101	134
Kuwait	Autocracy	3	Partial	No	50	113
Lebanon	1996: Anocracy 2013: Democracy	7	Partial	Low level (1996)	80	135
Libya	Anocracy	1	Partial	No	40	/
Mauritania	Anocracy	2	Complete	No	142	131
Morocco	1992: Autocracy 2013: Anocracy	3	Partial	Low level (1992)	92	133
Oman	Autocracy	2	Partial	No	64	128
Qatar	Autocracy	1	Complete	No	113	116
Saudi Arabia	Autocracy	1	Complete	No	56	130
Syria	Autocracy	3	Partial	No	125	139
Tunisia	1992: Autocracy 2013: Autocracy	2	No	High level (1992)	48	123
United Arab Emirates	Autocracy	3	Complete	No	43	115
Yemen	Autocracy	2	Complete	Yes[6]	152	142

[2] Based on the True & Minstrom (2001) data, unless mentioned otherwise.
[3] (United Nations Development Programme, 2013)
[4] (World Economic Forum, 2014)
[5] (MENA-OECD, 2014, p. 8; OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 97)
[6] (Global Women's Leadership Initiative, 2013)

Additionally, it is mentioned whether the countries have sharia law. Here partial implementation of sharia law indicates that the country only applies it to personal status and family law, while complete implementation of sharia law indicates that, next to personal status and family law, it is also applied to criminal proceedings. This means that women are disadvantaged on numerous aspects. In almost all countries – except Libya and Oman – the application of sharia law, for example, means that the testimony of a woman in court only counts for half a man's testimony. Personal-status law also regulates 'marriages, divorce, child guardianship, inheritance and other aspect of family life' (Freedom House, 2010, p. 2). This often translates in a marginal position of women in where the husband is the head of the family and makes the decisions, it is difficult for women to request a divorce which is later on often 'punished' why losing custody over children and have little entitlement to inheritance. Next, it is indicated whether the countries have implemented gender mainstreaming. Most countries are based on the findings of True & Minstrom (2001) which also includes the level of gender mainstreaming. However, since it is a study of fourteen years ago, other sources have also been used to see whether there other countries have also adopted the strategy.

Furthermore, two indexes of gender inequality are included in the tablet to give perspective about the topic. The Gender Inequality Index has also been included in the table, to give an idea about how these countries score concerning gender inequality. The Gender Inequality index is formulated on three levels on where inequality can manifest itself namely: '*reproductive health* measured by maternal mortality ration and adolescent birth rates; *empowerment* measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and *economic status* expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male population aged 15 years and older' (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). The Global Gender Gap Index is based on various economic, political, education- and health-based criteria by looking at the difference in labour force participation, access to education, live expectancy and difference in parliamentary and ministry positions among many other measured variables (World Economic Forum, 2015).

Immediately noticeable from this table is the large discrepancy between the two inequality indexes. It appears that the some countries score far better according to the Gender Inequality Index, than they do on the Global Gender Gap Index. Furthermore, the ratings of some of the countries are somewhat doubtful, such as the high ranking of Bahrain, Libya, Saudi Arabia

and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia, for example, has limited for females, they are not permitted to drive and are also prohibited from travelling alone to either the supermarket or across the country and thus basically live a segregated life. How can such a country rank 56th on the gender inequality index?

Apparently, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) uses a mix of absolute and relative indicators which makes the interpretation complex (Permanyer, 2013, p. 32). Permanyer (2013) also mentions other disadvantages to the index, namely that it '(i) penalizes low-income countries for poor performances in reproductive health indicators that are not entirely explained by the gender-related norms or discriminative practices against women that the GII purports to measure, (ii) does not reach the expected or normatively desirable value whenever women and men fare equally in 32 all indicators, (iii) allows deteriorations in women's education and economic participation to be compensated by equivalent deteriorations in men's corresponding dimensions but somewhat arbitrarily does not allow for any such compensation when a deterioration in women's reproductive health conditions occurs, and (iv) completely disregards men's average health statuses which are also essential pieces of information that should be incorporated in a comprehensive assessment of gender inequality levels' (p. 32&33). So perhaps the second indicator, the Global Gender Gap Index, gives a better representation of gender equality in the region.

Gender mainstreaming practices

Looking at gender mainstreaming it appears that nine countries have adopted the strategy to some degree. Morocco, for example, has established the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development, which 'has developed a national strategy plan for gender equality and aims to integrate a gender perspective at all development policies and programmes' (El Morabet Belhaj & Wiersingma, 2013, p. 4). It also strives to collaborate between the ministerial departments, non-governmental organisations and international organisations on a mutual gender equality approach (El Morabet Belhaj & Wiersingma, 2013, p. 4). Additionally, Morocco has also made a gender-sensitive budget which researches how much money is spent at which department and whether this is equally shared over policies for men and women.

In Algeria there is a similar ministry responsible for the promotion and protection of women's rights as in Morocco, only named The Ministry for the Family and the Status of Women (El

Morabet Belhaj & Wiersingma, 2013, p. 8). Additionally, there was a National Women's Council established in 1996 which is under the direct supervision of the head of government and includes female representatives of government agencies, organisations and experts (El Morabet Belhaj & Wiersingma, 2013, p. 8). It also proposes plan in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action mandate to improve the position of Algerian women on multiple levels (El Morabet Belhaj & Wiersingma, 2013, p. 8). Algeria has also created the Ministry for the Family and Status for Women (MDCFCF) in the 1990s with the aim of forming one national family policy by merging different ministerial approaches with the help of NGO's and other organisations (Economic Commission for Africa, 2009, p. 21). Not only this ministry is occupied with women's rights, also other ministries are involved in the matter. According to the Economic Commission for Africa (2009), the Ministries of Health, Justice, Interior, Education, Agriculture and Rural Development, Employment and National Solidarity, Labour and Social Security and Education and Vocational Training are engaged and responsible for the empowerment of women in their jurisdictions (p.21). This clearly demonstrates the use of gender mainstreaming, since not only one department is responsible for the empowerment of women, but multiple ministries are occupied with this task and especially within their own jurisdiction.

Many countries have also established such a National Council for Women as the one in Algeria, which often consists of numerous female representatives from different sectors of society. The Egyptian National Council for Women has been established in 2002 as an independent institution to empower the position of women and their responsibilities are to propose public policy, plan implementation of policy, to monitor and evaluate policy, drafting national plans and advise when important decisions concerning women are made (State Information Service, 2009; The National Council for Women, 2015, p. 2&3). It has incorporated a gender perspective by drafting a National Socio-Economic Development which addresses multiple facets of society. Additionally, in the case of Egypt 30 Equal Opportunities Units have also been developed and are applied 'under the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, and Inspection Department, at the Foreign Ministry' with the task of collecting data and conducting research to contribute in solving gender discrimination at the workplace (The National Council for Women, 2013).

The National Council of Women in Yemen tries to integrate a gender perspective into the development process by focusing on women's issues (Global Women's Leadership Initiative, 2013, p.62). However, as the sole government body to monitor the status of women over the

last10 years, its contribution in documenting and researching this subject has not always been positively received or appreciated and therefore faces difficulty concerning political representation (Global Women's Leadership Initiative, 2013, p.62).

All these established ministries do however seem to focus more on the traditional roles of women in society (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 13). Although they all aim at integrating a gender perspective into programmes or development policies, the responsibility is often still located within in one ministry or committee (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 16) while gender mainstreaming entails more the institutionalization of gender perspective under all ministries such as Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, and Health and so on. Gender mainstreaming thus decentralizes the subject of gender equality and makes it the responsibility of every department, while here gender is centralized in one ministry or committee.

Countries that focus not on the different effects policy can have on women and men face the risk of unintentionally discriminate against women (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 56). Often gender-neutral policies lead to the discrimination of women. This lack in attention to gender can be attributed to ‘gaps in knowledge and skills, to limited understanding that gender neutrality does not necessarily imply gender equality, or may have more ideological dimensions, where senior decision- makers or professional staff resist the changes entailed by gender equality’ (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 56).

There is also a regional subnational example of gender mainstreaming. Some countries – Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen – are members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). In 2012, three more members joined the ESCWA namely Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. They are commissioned to work on the economic and social development within the region. A gender mainstreaming strategy was developed and proposed within the ESCWA in 2005, but turned out to be not applicable everywhere and is not up to date concerning new mandates established by the United Nations (ESCWA, 2009, p. 4). The proposal for a gender mainstreaming strategy aimed at institutionalising gender into the ESCWA and thereby striving to create gender equality within the commission but also eventually within its member states (ESCWA, 2009, p. 17). However, since 2005, although some instruments and resolutions have been established concerning mainstreaming a gender perspective, ‘no formal written policy on gender mainstreaming has been developed specifically for ESCWA’ (ESCWA, 2009, p. 5). It also appeared that not everybody who

participated in the training programmes were convinced about the relevance of a gender perspective and were somewhat resistant to the method of mainstreaming gender in policy (ESCWA, 2009, p. 18).

Countries such as Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates can perhaps refer to their participation within the ESCWA and mention that gender mainstreaming takes place on the regional level or that they are addressing the issue of gender inequality through this body, without having to implement it in their own country. Although, such a scenario would suggest saying to commit to gender mainstreaming without the intention of implementing the right measures, hypotheses need to be tested to confirm whether sociological institutionalism of significance here.

4.2. Hypotheses

To test whether sociological institutionalism can explain the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the MENA region, two hypotheses have been developed. The first hypothesis was: *Authoritarian regimes are more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming, than more democratic regimes are.*

This hypothesis has been tested by looking at the regime types of all countries. Regime types have been classified according to the Polity IV three-part categorisation of democracies, anocracies and autocracies. This categorisation has been used to classify the regime times of the MENA countries in order to see which regime type is more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming strategies. An anocracy is described as an intermediate category with an incoherent mix of democratic and autocratic features (Polity IV, 2014). Since Polity IV does mention that anocracies are authority regimes and not democracies, an extra row has been added to table 2 which combines anocracies and autocracies. It is this combined row that represents the authoritarian regimes as mentioned in the hypothesis. Here it was assumed that repressive regimes feel more pressure to implement gender mainstreaming due to the growing importance of the international human rights discourse. By realising that there are low enforcement costs attached to adopting gender mainstreaming strategies, makes the strategy an accessible international agreement to comply to without the intention or capacity of implementing it (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 126).

Table 2. Regime types and gender mainstreaming

	Regime types and gender mainstreaming		
	Total number countries	Gender mainstreaming	No gender mainstreaming
Democracy	2	100 %	/
Anocracy	7	57,1 %	42,9 %
Autocracy	10	30 %	70 %
Anocracies and autocracies	17	41, 2 %	58, 8 %

From this table, it appears that from the democracies in the sample, both have adopted gender mainstreaming. While from the anocracies and autocracies, combined, only 41, 2 % have adopted gender mainstreaming. In fact, it appears that the more autocratic the regime is, the less likely it is to adopt gender mainstreaming. Especially since not even autocracies are more likely than anocracies to adopt gender mainstreaming. This would mean that the first hypothesis cannot be confirmed. However, one major remark must be made. The number of countries is not equally distributed over the different regime types, making it more difficult to generalise.

The second hypothesis was: *Among rights-violating governments, those with greater political autonomy from social input are more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming policies, while those with non-trivial limitations on the sovereign's autonomy are less likely to do so*

All counties in the sample are taken as rights-violating governments. This hypothesis has been tested by looking at the institutional constraints governments face with the decision-making process. This has also been tested with the assistance of Polity IV, since among other things they also calculate the executive constraints on a government. The division is made between category four (intermediate category) and five (substantial limitations on executive authority), meaning that up to category five, countries are considered to have significant or relative political autonomy, while countries with scores from five and upwards are considered to have a substantial level of institutional constraints which influences the decision-making process. Here is was assumed that autonomous rules are more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming as

symbolic commitment, because these sovereigns are free to entertain even more extreme forms of hypocrisy than characterize normal states, while constrained rules are more apprehensive for fear of inciting a process of resistance by domestic opposition and interest groups' (Hafner-Burton, et al., 2008, p. 126).

From table 1, it becomes clear that most countries are considered to have significant or relative political autonomy and only three countries in the MENA region have substantial institutional constraints which are Algeria, Israel and Lebanon. Among the political autonomous countries, only six countries have adopted gender mainstreaming (37, 5 %), while all the countries with substantial institutional constraints have adopted gender mainstreaming strategies (100 %). This means that the assumption that nation-states with greater political autonomy are more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming compared to nation-states with greater institutional constraints does not hold. This result could perhaps be attributed to the democratic effect as stated by Hafner-Burton et al. (2008). Perhaps there is also an institutional match between the democratic principles of accountability and gender mainstreaming, making it a greater likelihood for countries whose government face greater public and political accountability to accept the method of gender mainstreaming. Looking at the countries with greater institutional constraints it also seems that they score better on regime types, thus somewhat confirming a democratic effect.

The Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) argument does however hold when looking at human rights treaties, i.e. CEDAW convention. Most of the countries – with the exception of Iran – located in the MENA region have in fact signed and ratified the CEDAW convention although they have also made severe reservations (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p.13). The ratifying of such a convention is far easier than implementing a fully-fledged strategy that effects all government departments so it is a more accessible way of gaining state-legitimacy.

Another expectation was that although countries state that they have adopted gender mainstreaming, no real institutional implementation have been made to guarantee the incorporation of gender perspective throughout government departments. Lilia Labidi, as the former Minister of Women's Affairs in Tunisia, has stated that 'the lack of adequate funding and institutional capacity of the relevant governmental administrations may not be present at the constitutional or formal policy level, but they become apparent at the level of implementation' (Al-Kadasi & Dadkhad, 2013). The institutions might be there, but they are

empty, she claims during a two-panel discussion on ‘Can International Human Rights Norms secure Women’s Rights in the MENA region? (Al-Kadasi & Dadkhad, 2013) She also expressed her doubt about the level of commitment by the Tunisian government to improve women’s rights, especially since many male civil servants express unwillingness to work on woman’s programs (Al-Kadasi & Dadkhad, 2013). Women’s rights activist and international lawyer, Kahina Bouagache contributed in the discussion by stating that there is still a large gap between the rhetoric of an international convention of mandate and mechanisms that guarantee enforcement on the national level which prevents the development of strong institutions and the overall improvement of women’s rights (Al-Kadasi & Dadkhad, 2013).

The emptiness of the implemented gender mainstreaming institutions is also confirmed by the report from the OECD and CAWTAR (2014). Despite nation-states stating that they have adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy, a closer look reveals that the implementation of these strategies often have severe shortcomings. According to the OECD/CAWTAR (2014) report only some countries have actively tried to comply with international standards by trying to integrate them into national constituencies, but the majority of states remains focused on national standards about women’s right and gender equality, resulting in numerous reservations made to international agreements that diminishes the impact of these agreements (p.66). The newly drafted constitution in Egypt for example would ensure a non-discriminatory policy on sexes concerning participation in political parties, but no effective institutions were established to regulate this (El Morabet Belhaj & Wiersingma, 2013, p. 21). Prohibition of gender-based discrimination is more often included in national constitutions, but explicit guarantees often remain absent (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 15). So although nations-states in the MENA region ‘sign most of the international conventions, they are not fully implemented on the ground’ (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 66).

Finally, it might be interesting to look at what gender mainstreaming does for gender equality or the overall state of development in the state. Despite the debatable scores for gender equality, it can provide insight in which countries tends to score better on human development. The index of the United Nations Development Programme is divided in the following categories: Very high human development (countries 1 to 49), high human development (countries 50 to 102), medium human development (countries 103 to 144), and low human development (countries 145 to 187). Although the countries with gender mainstreaming do

appear to score slightly higher than those without gender mainstreaming, but since the sample is quite small no real generalisations can be made.

Table 2. Gender Inequality Index 2014

Gender Inequality Index 2014				
	Very high human development	High human development	Medium human development	Low human development
Countries with gender mainstreaming (9)	33, 3 %	44, 4%	22, 2%	/
Countries without gender mainstreaming (10)	20 %	30 %	50 %	/

From the two hypotheses in this chapter it does not seem that sociological institutionalism explains the occurrence of gender mainstreaming. However, it appears that even though some nation-states claim to adopt gender mainstreaming, there is a lack in enforcing institutions that guarantee the mainstreaming of gender perspective. This does still imply to some extent that nation-states only merely claim to adopt gender mainstreaming without really enforcing it. The absence of a gender perspective in all government departments can also be attributed to institutional incapacity and the lacking of adequate funds, but there is also a noticeable unwillingness to work on women programs. So perhaps the problem lies with the match between the principle of gender equality and the domestic context. The next chapter addresses the implications of the results presented in this chapter and also looks at alternative explanations.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Based on the two hypotheses presented in the previous chapter, sociological institutionalism did not explain the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the MENA region. Therefore other explanations need to be presented to explain the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in this region. This chapter aims at discussing the findings of the previous chapter and provides other explanations to why gender mainstreaming does occur in some countries while it remains absent in others. Additionally, it also mentions recommendations for further research possibilities.

Discrepancy between international and local norms

The absence of gender mainstreaming in most countries in the Middle East can perhaps be explained by the great discrepancy between international norms such as gender equality and religion. Freedom House (2010) states that 'deeply entrenched societal norms, combined with conservative interpretations of Sharia law, continue to regulate women to subordinate positions' (p.2). Even with the support of important actors, gender equality does not necessarily gain ground in the region since conservative religious sentiments are omnipresent in society. For example, despite the claim made by the Tunisian President about respecting women's rights, Tunisian women fear that the president will not be able to fulfil his promise due to strong conservative principles propagated in society and by political parties such as the Salafist party (El Morabet Belhaj & Wiersingma, 2013, p. 12). This confirms the notion that religion can play a major counterforce into achieving more gender equality through for example the strategy of gender mainstreaming.

It seems that religion and gender mainstreaming, or gender equality in general, do not really work together in this region. 'Some negative cultural traditions as well as practices and customs contradicting with Islamic laws and codes in Arab countries hinder the advancement of women and achieving gender equality, which constitutes an obstacle in terms of implementing a core change in this context' (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2009, p. 22). The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia also states that the existing gap between legislation and the everyday life can be attributed to not only movements that want to hold on to patriarchal structures and other old-fashioned practices but also to the false interpretation of religion about the position of females (2009, p. 22). This

causes resistance to legislation reforms and prevents people from committing to new ideas about empowering women (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2009, p. 22). Religion is also often mentioned 'as a reason not to comply with international conventions' (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 66). So apparently, there is no value attached to incorporating a gender perspective, which means that gender mainstreaming lacks the local legitimacy to be an effective strategy to change gender dynamics in the region.

The World Bank has stated that some features make the MENA countries quite distinctive compared to other developing countries. A relative high income per capita, traditional gender norms, high presence of religion through society, a legal system that is based on religious beliefs, 'economic structures that are characterised by public sectors and the majority of the world's oil reserve' are all features that characterise the nexus of the gender problem in the MENA region according to the World Bank (2013, p. 52). They attribute the low rates of female workforce participation to the combination of all these previous mentioned features. The deeply entrenched religious norms about gender lead to the marginalisation of the position of women in society and without the need for them to participate in economic life – due to high incomes per capita and large oil reserves – these countries functions well enough with mostly men working. Limited female participation in society results in the subordinate position of women on all economic, political and social levels. Without this participation, women are not empowered enough to question gender policies, making the government feel indifferently to address the issue of gender equality. Without breaking this pattern, governments have no incentives of changing the system since they simply do well enough without female participation.

Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) have placed significance with an institutional or cultural match between democratic principles and the signing of human rights treaties which they have called the democratic effect. A cultural match can be understood as existing communalities that are found between two social entities, which makes the process of norm diffusion happen more rapidly (Strang & Meyer, 1993, p. 490). A common ground between international norms and national culture and beliefs makes it more likely for such a international norm to be accepted and taken over. When there is no match, the international norm can for example be related to colonialism or Western imperialism and cause rejection (Cortell & Davis, 2002, p. 74). A cultural match can increase the likelihood of norm diffusion and thus the transfer of an international norm such as gender equality to the MENA region. Based on this reasoning,

there would be a greater institutional or cultural match between the international norm of gender equality and those countries that have adopted gender mainstreaming than those who have not. It appeared from hypothesis two that those countries in the MENA region with greater institutional constraints were more likely to have gender mainstreaming. So there does seem to be some significance to a cultural or institutional match.

So the universalistic approach of gender mainstreaming does not match with local traditions and practices. Perhaps with more attention to the local context and practices incorporated into the strategy, gender mainstreaming will be adopted on more occasions in the MENA region. Especially, since 'feminist scholars have pointed out that gender issues will only be mainstreamed in global policy when gender issues are given substantive meaning in specific social contexts and policymaking processes' (True, 2010, p. 376). The United Nations has even pointed out that a multiple-track strategy for gender mainstreaming has greater potential for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment' (UN Women, 2014, p. 17). According to the UN Women (2014), such a multiple-track to gender mainstreaming would mean a combination of target interventions that addresses how the advancement of women can be arranged within local institutions and specific contexts, with the universalistic approach of integrating gender in all existing policies and programmes (p. 44).

There is always the risk of ending up with a watered-down version of gender equality when too much focus is placed on the local context. But this risk is levelled by also incorporating a gender perspective into all government policies and programmes. In this way the universal application of gender equality is combined with respecting local traditions and practices. However, this approach to gender mainstreaming also has it shortcomings. It is critiqued that 'it has often led to away-streaming the goal of gender equality, i.e., making it invisible or unaccounted for; that it has reduced resources for gender expertise, gender statistics, gender analysis and client-oriented services; and that it has limited investments in longer-term institution building within development sectors and government agencies' (UN Women, 2014, p. 17).

International scrutiny

Another explanation for the low presence of gender mainstreaming the MENA region could be that some countries face lower levels of scrutiny from the international community on their

national gender policy. This could coincide with an economic argument. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates for example are all in the top ten oil producers in the world (International Energy Agency, 2014, p. 11) and are thus of great value to western powers such as the United States and the European Union. This economic argument is perhaps a reason why their policy on gender is somewhat overlooked. In contrary with the other countries in the MENA region, who do not have such large resources that are vital for powerful international actors. Without important resources, the international community perhaps focuses more on their national policy, increasing their necessity to comply with international standards. This argument can be strengthened by looking at whether some of these countries have loans with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Countries seeking financial aid of the IMF often have to agree to certain reforms in order to get these funds. Although gender mainstreaming is unlikely to be a requirement for an IMF loan – requirements often entail making economic or market based reforms – it could contribute to the overall assessment of these countries. At least, an IMF loan would increase the attention of the international community on their national policy and therefore also their regulations on women's rights and gender equality.

The OECD/CAWTAR report even goes so far in saying that without the support of foreign donors, some ministries would not take the effort of complying with international standards by for example implementing gender units (p. 66). So the OECD/CAWTAR report does confirm the importance of financial aid to whether countries adopt gender mainstreaming. Looking at the MENA countries, it appears that Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Yemen all have some form of loans with the IMF (International Monetary Fund, 2015). Coinciding, all these countries also have adopted gender mainstreaming policies. This does not necessarily confirm that gender mainstreaming is only adopted when financial aid is given, but it is clear that such loans draw more attention to national policies by the international community. A possible consequent result could be adapting to international standards, such as gender mainstreaming, in order to satisfy the international community

State-based variables

It could also be that countries initially commit to gender mainstreaming, but realise after this promise that they lack the institutional capacity to fully arrange a gender perspective throughout government institutions. Also possible is that after the formal commitment,

internal turmoil rises or external threats present themselves which temporarily draws attention to other priorities. In Yemen, for example, the current political status of the country has also shifted the priority of gender equality and has made it difficult for the authority to comply with international standard such as gender equality (Al-Kadasi & Dadkhad, 2013). This can also be attributed to Libya, who since the Arab Spring has fallen into a state of instability resulting in a still on-going civil war. Normally, institutional structures are already under a lot of pressure during a civil war so it can definitely not ensure the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in wartime. Political instability could function as a reason why nation-states in the Middle-East and North Africa do not adopt gender mainstreaming strategies or adopt GM practices but are incapable of implementing them. Besides political instability, there is also limited understanding that gender neutral policy does not necessarily mean gender equality, but there also resides political unwillingness or even resistance in the region to implement a gender perspective into all levels of government (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 92). This contributes to the difficulty of implementing a successful gender mainstreaming strategy.

But for gender mainstreaming to be effectively adopted in the MENA region, a transformative change in society is needed. Silva de Alwis contributes to this argument by proposing that nation-states should create new societal norms that comply with international norms concerning human rights, since the often made reservations on international agreements only limits the impact it can have on women's rights in the region (Al-Kadasi & Dadkhad, 2013). Although the OECD/CAWTAR report (2014) also states the importance of eliminating discriminatory legislation, compliance with international norms and allowing women to fully participate in public and political life, for successful gender mainstreaming to happen in the MENA region there needs to be 'a cultural change in societal norms and standards concerning women's rights' (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 57). Changing society and thereby aiming to end discriminatory practices against women while keep respecting religious norm is the big challenge for the MENA region (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 56). Nevertheless, this would be the way to achieve better gender equality in the region. The key to changing societal norms is by education, increasing awareness about women's rights and the overall cooperation between the government, women's groups, NGO's and other international organisations (Al-Kadasi & Dadkhad, 2013)

Recommendations for further research

Since there is still lack in country specific studies within the gender literature (Sainsbury & Bergqvist, 2009, p. 218), more detailed studies about MENA countries and their internal dimensions need to be explored to understand the general trend about why these countries adopt gender mainstreaming. Other theories such as liberalism, realism or social constructivism can also be tested so whether they give satisfying answers. Furthermore, it might be interesting to analyse how more local legitimacy for gender mainstreaming in the Middle East and North Africa can be achieved. A lack in local legitimacy or a low level of it reduces the chance that global norms will be accepted since apparently they are attributed low value within the domestic context. So increasing local legitimacy for gender mainstreaming is a vital component of making the strategy successful in aiming towards gender equality.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming is a 'strategy that re-invents the process of policy design, implementation and evaluation by taking into account the gender-specific and often diverse interests and values of differently situated women and men' (True, 2010, p. 371). By incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of policy-making, the responsibility of gender equality is shared among all relevant government actors resulting in the improvement of women's rights in all relevant jurisdictions. This thesis is derived from the curiosity as to why gender mainstreaming occurs in the Middle East and North Africa, while this region is known for its repressive nature and conservative attitudes to women's rights and human rights in general. The research question in this thesis has been: *To what extent can sociological institutionalism explain the adoption of gender mainstreaming in the MENA region.*

It was assumed that the occurrence could be attributed to the desire of gaining more state legitimacy. Since repressive regimes are under more international scrutiny for their practices, they tend to sign more human rights treaties than their liberal counterparts in order to be perceived as legitimate states (Hafner-Burton, 2008, p. 132). Additionally, it was assumed that the same logic used by Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) could be used for gender mainstreaming in the Middle East and North Africa. The high international scrutiny combined with low enforcement mechanisms, makes decoupling between the purpose of gender mainstreaming and the intention of implementation easy for these repressive regimes. This causes gender mainstreaming to be a fairly accessible and low costing measure to commit to in order to gain more state legitimacy. Besides the formal commitment, no effective institutions would be developed that ensure the mainstreaming of a gender perspective at all government levels.

However with the falsification of both hypothesis established in chapter three, sociological institutionalism does not seem to explain the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the region. Repressive regimes are thus not more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming strategies compared to their regional liberal counterparts. Additionally, also regimes with greater political autonomy where also not more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming compared to countries with greater institutional constraints. Although, it does appear that those countries who have formally committed to gender mainstreaming have not implemented effective institutions that guarantee the mainstreaming of a gender perspective or the institutions in place are not in compliance with international standards (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 16).

This can be attributed to ‘the absence of legislation enabling gender mainstreaming, the complexity of existing laws, limited effective co-ordination mechanism and limited capacity to promote a whole-of-government perspective’ (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 92). Additionally, unwillingness to execute gender perspectives to government programmes also seems to prevail under many civil servants. Apparently there is little value attached to integrating a gender perspective throughout government institutions, meaning that there is a low level of local legitimacy for gender mainstreaming in the Middle East and North Africa. A low level of local legitimacy prevents the diffusion of the international norm of gender equality to society, making it difficult for gender mainstreaming to work effectively in the region. As it turns out, most gender mainstreaming strategies in the region entail the establishment of a single ministry of committee that bares the responsibility over gender which is contrary to GM practice is a centralisation of gender instead of implementing it under all government departments. This can be the result of the low level of legitimacy attributed to the strategy. Without the local legitimacy, civil servant do not feel obliged to ensure the full mainstreaming of gender resulting in the limited application of the strategy.

It looks like that the great discrepancy between religion and international standards such as gender equality is the reason why the majority of countries have not adopted gender mainstreaming. Religion has also be mentioned as one of the main reasons why nation-states make reservations to international agreements, suggesting that can also function as a counterforce in countries with gender mainstreaming. It appears that this lack of cultural match between the world cultural norm of gender equality does not correspond with deeply entrenched societal norms about women. One solution could be the implementation of a multiple-track to gender mainstreaming in where the universal application of gender equality is combined with specific targeted interventions that focus on the local context. Although this approach to gender mainstreaming also has its shortcomings.

Another way would be to develop an effective enforcement mechanism that ensures compliance with the international norm of gender mainstreaming. With higher subsequent costs linked to adopting gender mainstreaming, nation-states would be forced to install effective institutions that actually do what they have committed to. Although this perhaps prevents repressive regimes from committing at all to any strategy that aims at improving gender equality. Despite the empty institutions and insufficient mainstreaming of a gender perspective, the presence of at least one ministry or committee dedicated to gender equality

can improve the situation for women in those countries. Slow evolution is perhaps better than no change at all.

Concluding, although the research question cannot formally be confirmed there is still some uncertainty about the reason why gender mainstreaming occurs in the region. Those countries who have adopted the strategy have either implemented incorrectly or have empty institutions that not effectively mainstream a gender perspective throughout government departments. Overall, despite the formal commitment to gender mainstreaming, women are still discriminated according to the law and in policies (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014, p. 56). This leaves the question open to why these countries adopt to this strategy without carrying it out substantially? Whether this can be attributed to conservative religious attitudes, political and public unwillingness or institutional capacity cannot be answered with certainty, but definitely more research is desirable to answer unquestionably the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the Middle East and North Africa.

Summary

As gender mainstreaming was introduced at the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action as the new mandate of the United Nations to achieve gender equality, the strategy has gained wide political support and many countries have implemented the strategies in their national constituencies. The amounted of countries adopting the strategy seem to, on the one hand, illustrate the international commitment to gender equality, but on the other hand raise scepticism about the true level of commitment, especially by repressive regimes. The focus is on the Middle East and North Africa because of its under-researched nature within gender literature and because the contradicting nature of adopting gender mainstreaming and having conservative attitudes towards women's rights and gender equality. Based on the institutionalist argument by Hafner-Burton et al .(2008) that repressive regimes are more prone to sign and ratify human rights treaties because of their willingness for state legitimacy, it was assumed that gender mainstreaming was perhaps another way of repressive regimes gaining more state legitimacy for the international community. Therefore this thesis tried to answer the research question: To what extent can sociological institutionalism explain the adoption of gender mainstreaming by repressive regimes in the MENA region?

Gender mainstreaming can be understood as the institutionalisation of gender by incorporating a gender perspective into all stages – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – of policy-making and into all government departments. Unequal gender outcomes can be re-addressed by incorporating a gender perspective that evaluates every piece of policy or legislation on the gender aspect and thereby creating gender-sensitive policy that strives to improve gender equality (True, 2010, p. 371). In this way the responsibility of gender is decentralised and instead of one specific committee assigned to the focus on the empowerment of women, all government ministries and departments are responsible for the advancement of women's rights in their respective fields. Examples of gender mainstreaming are gender budgets, national strategies, gender-auditing of public policies and gender-disaggregated statistics (True & Minstrom, 2001, p. 33). However, gender mainstreaming has also been called highly interpretable and extremely dependable on the willingness of political actors. Additionally, without an effective international control mechanism the strategy faces the risk of becoming a fashionable international concept to which nation-states have no intention of implementing but use it to get credit in the eyes of the international community.

Sociological institutionalism entails that structures or norms are given value based on social legitimation. For example, bureaucratic organisations are not praised because of their efficient way of organising complex issues, but because they are perceived by the world - the external context or environment – as being the best way to organise things. The importance of bureaucratic organisation has been extended to the political entity in where the sovereign nation-states have become the sole legitimate political organisation in the world (Finnamore, 1996, p. 132). The external environment where nation-states are located in – or world culture – establishes legitimate and desirables goals for nation-states to strive for. Good state behaviour takes place when nation-states adhere to requirements or cultural norms that are also produced by world culture. Nation-states want to comply with these requirements, because they want to be perceived as legitimate states. Therefore, world cultural norms lead to the isomorphic outcome of all or a majority of states accepting these prescribed global legitimate policies. Examples of such requirements are signing and ratifying human rights treaties or adopting gender mainstreaming strategies. Since all states are organised in the same way and all states participate within world culture, world cultural norms leads to the isomorphic outcomes of a majority of states accepting these legitimate requirements for good state behaviour.

Since gender mainstreaming is perceived as a globally defined cultural norm, it is expected that the repressive regimes in the MENA region adopt this strategy in order to gain more state legitimacy. It is assumed that authoritarian regimes are more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming than their liberal counterparts. Additionally, it is also assumed that regimes who have less institutional constraints concerning their decision-making power are more likely to adopt gender mainstreaming than those countries who face considerably political accountability. Besides the formal commitment to gender mainstreaming, it is also expected that no real effective institutions are established that guarantee the mainstreaming of gender in all government departments.

From the MENA countries nine have adopted gender mainstreaming policies, while the other ten have not. These forms of gender mainstreaming often included the establishment of a single ministry or committee responsible for gender; although this does not really constitute as the mainstreaming of gender. Additionally, these ministries were often focused on the more traditional roles women have or should have in society. Both hypotheses were falsified in chapter four, meaning that sociological institutionalism does not explain the occurrence of

gender mainstreaming in the region. Nevertheless, it did seem that despite of the formal commitment and the development of some institutions, these institutions were in fact empty and did not contribute to the mainstreaming of gender or gender equality in general. The countries often remained focused on national ideas about gender instead of concentrating on international standards.

Overall there seems to be a too large discrepancy between international standards about gender equality and the local practices and especially religion in the region. Conservative attitudes and deeply entrenched societal norms prevents transformative change in where it grants women more rights and leads to greater gender equality. It is likely to presume that there is no cultural match between international standards about gender equality and local practices in those countries where there is no gender mainstreaming. This could perhaps means that this cultural match is greater in those countries where there is gender mainstreaming. To take into account local customs better, the United Nations proposes the use of a multi-track approach to gender mainstreaming in where the universalistic standards concerning gender equality are included but also target-interventions that aim to focus on context specific issues. The absence of gender mainstreaming in some countries could be attributed to the low level of international scrutiny, mostly because these countries belong to the top ten world producers in oil. This economic argument and the international importance of these countries on an energy level could potentially decrease the international emphasis on their gender policy. On the other hand, the countries with gender mainstreaming are under more scrutiny by the international community because they are perhaps of less economic value to them. Additionally four countries currently have financial loans running at the International Monetary Fund, which could attribute to their necessity to adopt internationally accepted policies. Recommendations for further research possibilities entail analysing other theoretical approach that explain the occurrence of gender mainstreaming, more detailed country-specific studies to understand the general trend and looking at how more local legitimacy can be achieved so that gender mainstreaming can be better match with the local customs and traditions of the Middle East and North Africa.

However, transformative cultural change is needed to address gender equality in the MENA region. Without transforming societal norms, the abolishment of discriminatory legislation and the incorporation of a gender perspective into all government departments is not enough. The challenge for the MENA region thus lies with respecting religious norms while also

improving the position of women. Based on the two hypothesis sociological institutionalism did not explain the occurrence of gender mainstreaming in the Middle East and North Africa. Scepticism however remains, since besides the formal commitment no effective institutions have been implemented to guarantee the incorporation of a gender perspective. So unfortunately the question remains why countries in the Middle East and North Africa adopt gender mainstreaming without the intention of implementing the strategy effectively.

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