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Gendered Socializations and 'Critical Reflexivity' in an Elite University in Lebanon

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Abstract

Gender inequality in education has been well documented in the literature, in light of family and school socialization. We build on this literature and focus from a micro sociological perspective on the emergence of 'critical reflexivity' in the specific case of a group of university scholarship students in Lebanon. Through observations and in-depth interviews, we identify gender differentiated prior dispositions that influence university experiences of those students and their career plans and demonstrate that critical reflexivity involves a process of negotiation between two fields. Family control was associated with success in studies at the expense of the social aspects of university. Gendered norms also reflected on their choices of major. Furthermore, in examining cases of emergence of reflexivity, we find that prior socialization experiences, namely degree of social conservatism, experience of change as well as social heterogeneity, influence the development of 'critical reflexivity' as students encountered a new social environment.

Keywords: Gender inequality, higher education, family practices, habitus, dispositions, critical reflexivity

Introduction

This article focuses on the mechanisms of production and reproduction of gender inequalities in higher education in the specific case of a scholarship program for underprivileged students, funded by an international development agency, giving equal access to women to a prestigious university in Lebanon. This case study allows us to examine a change in social context of students as a possible lead for development of 'critical reflexivity'. It thus evaluates to what extent prior dispositions continue to influence university experiences of students and their career plans.

While statistics show high rates of gender parity in overall access to education at least at primary level (Mjaaland 2018; Psaki, McCarthy, and Mensch 2018), researchers note that gender inequalities persist and take other forms (Chisamya et al. 2012).

Studies have also looked at the gender differentiated success in school (das Does Guerreiro, Caetano, and Rodrigues 2014; Carvalho 2015; Moguerou and Santelli 2015; Ellis 2017), choice of majors as well as career expectations (Erwin 1997; Fathi 2018) and examined them in the light of family and educational institutions as agents of 'gender socialisation' (Foroutan 2018).

The link between higher success rate and gendered family practices in terms of stricter family control and household duties on young women has been well documented; socialization in the family appears to favor, the development of behaviors desired by schools in girls and not in boys. This was the case among girls from poor urban communities in Brazil (Carvalho 2015), immigrant North African women in France (Mogurou, Hamel, and Santelli 2013) and rural and working-class women in Jamaica (Ellis 2017). In contrast men who receive less hours of supervision and enjoy more freedom in the streets of the community are under the influence of peer socialization and perform less favorably (Ellis 2017).

The gender stereotypes that are inculcated during primary socialization manifest in academic behaviours whereby girls are potentially better prepared than boys to meet the expectations at school and satisfy the rules of the role of student, and in turns leads to, less ambitious, safer majors and career aspirations among women in comparison to men and thus to gender inequalities in the types of majors chosen (Baudelot and Establet 1998). Researchers also examine the role of parents in the formation of aspirations and

career pathways, and according to Fathi (2018) who looked at the process of becoming a woman doctor in Iran, parental surveillance is found to play a role of in children's educational ambitions and recognition of the value of different types of higher education.

Educational institutions have also been identified as agents of gender socialization: Some researchers looked at the association between gender identity and school materials such as books (Weitzman et al. 1972; Paivandi 2008; Foroutan 2018). These have been demonstrated to represent women and men in different ways sometimes more specifically in terms of language or images used (Weitzman et al. 1972; Lee and Collins 2008; Foroutan 2012). Others looked at universities as institutions. Erwin (1997) noted that these continue to be experienced by women as a gendered site of learning. Looking at the way in which undergraduate women negotiate their career aspirations, she shows that women are still constrained by traditional conceptions of women's responsibilities for household management and child rearing.

This study builds upon this literature to explore the mechanisms of persistence of gender inequalities in education at a micro sociological level. By drawing upon Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus, it examines firstly, the effect of family socialization, through which men and women internalize different gendered dispositions, on their experiences at university and their projection into the future. Secondly, it offers an interesting opportunity to look at instances in which reflexivity occurs within higher education.

We particularly look at the reactions in response to a change in social context whereby a group of underprivileged scholarship students from different backgrounds encounters a new social environment within an elite university in the capital, Beirut.

While an emerging critical feminist perspective draws attention to gendered processes to examine how these can be 'undone' (Butler 2004; Sullivan 2004; Nayak and Kehily 2006; Stromquist and Fischman 2009), few studies look at it from a micro sociological perspective, through examining the mechanisms and conditions in which it occurs. As such, this study looks at prior dispositions that may explain the differences that emerge among individuals in the way they are socialized at university. It highlights the transformations that take place in certain cases, examining changes in gender

identities among the students and the mechanisms of emergence of ‘critical reflexivity’ as they encounter a new social environment.

By taking into consideration the diversity of dispositions that constitute the habitus (Lahire 2011), we argue that reflexivity must itself be understood to be rooted in habitus; as such, the strength of prior dispositions (which constitute the habitus) influences the way in which university is experienced as well as the likelihood of students to develop and maintain critical reflexivity.

We will first introduce gender inequalities within the Lebanese education context and discuss how the scholarship program examined here fits into this context. Second, we will present theoretical framework and methodology. Following that, and employing the concepts of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1977) and of ‘gender dispositions’ (McCall 1992), we will analyse how the social context shapes university experiences as well as career plans. Finally, by adhering to Lahire’s dispositional approach (Lahire 2011), we will examine the cases in which reflexivity emerges to understand the emergence of ‘critical reflexivity’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Gender Inequality in Higher Education in Lebanon

Access to education to women is generally believed to lead to women’s higher earnings and occupational mobility (Rankin and Aytac 2006). However, in some regions, women have not benefited from these opportunities, despite the positive impact of educational reforms on their position (Ilkcaracan 2002). In the Lebanese context, Lattouf (2004) states that while access to resources played an important role in giving women access to power and higher status in society, it has not been sufficient.

Unlike several countries in the region in which girls are less likely to attend school, a reverse gender effect benefitting girls, appears in Lebanon. The significant dropout phenomenon that emerges after age 15 is more common among boys (Kasparian 2003). UNESCO (2013) data shows that 51.5% of students in secondary education are female. This proportion is higher than the global average proportion of all the countries (47.9%), the average proportion of developing countries (47.8%) and even that of developed countries (48.8%) in the same year. This discrepancy between boys and girls is even

more significant at the higher education level (49% for boys and 86% for girls). However, it should be noted that despite this, parents prefer to enrol their sons rather than their daughters in private universities when their financial resources are limited as stated by El Amine and Faour (1998). According to them, the role of men is to ensure the livelihood of a family, while the education of women is traditionally considered a means for a better marriage. The current study re-examines and actualizes the attitudes and the socialization process within families in Lebanon in the present years.

Understanding the gender dimension in Lebanon requires a brief overview of its socio- cultural composition and governance; the population is estimated to be around 4 million within which 18 confessions are officially recognized. Its constitution sets out the principle of equality of all citizens. However, the confessional structure of government (i.e. formal pluralistic sectarianism) seems to reinforce patriarchal interpretations of the law and therefore to further restrict the rights of Lebanese women, particularly as they relate to family, personal status, and sensitive issues concerning citizenship and nationality (Bazalgette and Mohamed 2015). Described as the ‘most westernized Arab nation’, Lebanon enjoys relaxed codes regarding women’s participation in economic and political activities (Sidani 2005) and allows women to pursue jobs and responsibilities outside traditionally allocated roles (Sidani 2002). Yet, in the job market, the status of women has not changed as women still make up a low percentage (24.9%) of the total Lebanese labour force in comparison to 57% in the UK (World Bank 2016). The increase in unemployment rates among university graduates, as the number of higher education institutions multiplied, affects women in particular (Longuenesse 2014). In addition, the participation of women in the workforce in Lebanon led to only mild progression in women’s careers as Lebanese women continue to cluster at lower and supervisory management levels (Jamali, Safieddine, and Daouk 2006).

This society corresponds to what Sharabi (1992) qualifies as ‘neopatriarchal’, characterized by politically and economically dependent capitalism in which women’s primary role in the community and family remains as one of homemaker and mother. While the Lebanese liberal economy created new opportunities for women, these opportunities only benefit a small group of women from privileged classes. In addition, according to the latest official data available from the Central Administration of Statistics

(2009), there appeared to be regional inequalities whereby employment rates of women are high in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon (31.4%) and drop in peripheral regions: 15.2% in the North, 18.3% in the South and 16.8% in the Bekaa governorates. These inequalities have most likely been further exacerbated by the massive influx of Syrian refugees since 2011 which increased labour supply in the area of low qualified jobs with major impacts on women (Gohlke-Rouhayem, Melki, and Weinmann 2016) especially in the peripheral regions, already suffering from higher rates of unemployment.

The contradiction between maintaining low employment rates among women while being qualified as the most westernized Arab nation in terms of the amount of freedom and autonomy that they enjoy, makes the case of Lebanon particularly interesting to examine the production and reproduction of gender hierarchies. In addition, its geographical and confessional diversity also talks to looking at this process at an individual level.

Scholarship program as an educational opportunity for women

The scholarship program, studied here, funded by an international development agency, operates in a largely privatized system in which prestigious universities are not accessible due to their cost. While ensuring geographical representation and gender balance, during the selection process, its beneficiaries are chosen based on academic results, financial needs and 'potential for leadership'. In the call for proposal by the funding agency, the program was presented as a tool to fill the gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged youth, by giving the latter access to 'quality' private education, with the goal of 'developing human capital' in Lebanon (Nimer 2014). The universities, selected to implement this program, include private institutions adopting the American liberal arts model of instruction among early missionary or second-generation confessional universities. The instruction, of supposedly high quality, is offered in English. By giving them access to these universities, covering tuition fees, accommodation and stipend, it increases in principle their chances of social promotion. Without this scholarship, its beneficiaries, would not have been able to afford a private elite university and women in particular, would have enrolled at the Lebanese (public) University by default or chosen one of the new affordable, non-elite private universities.

Indeed, in Lebanon, similarly to other countries in the region (El-Sanabary 1993), though the number of young women enrolled in higher education is higher than that of young men, the latter usually have priority in access to private education when the financial means of the family are limited.

I will study the case of one of the three universities that hosted the program. Interestingly, the number of women applicants ($n = 261$ or 74%) was much higher than that of men ($n=93$ or 26%). As such, the women were recruited in larger number to the program (47 women, 18 men). For many women, this scholarship program represented their only chance of access to a private prestigious institution, which may explain their motivation to apply.

This was illustrated in several of the in-depth interviews with the scholarship students; Amira (from a village in the South of Lebanon) is one of them. Her older sister obtained a bachelor's degree from the Lebanese University (public) in biochemistry. She could not find a job in Beirut and ended up working a few hours a week in her village as a school-teacher. On the other hand, when her older brother was not accepted at the Lebanese University because of his low grades, he enrolled in engineering studies at a private university to 'avoid the fate' of his sister. Amira, however, would have enrolled like her sister, at the public university, her 'only choice', had she not received the scholarship. It appeared in many such cases that the families give their son the opportunity to study in a prestigious field no matter the cost, whereas for Amira, as for a number of women, the scholarship represented a unique chance to access private education.

As for the (non-scholarship) students within the host university population, women appear to be overrepresented as well, but to a lesser extent (59% of women for 41% of men). According to the rector of the university, this may be due to the fact, that the fields of study that typically attract men (such as engineering), are not offered there.

The scholarship program required its recipients to maintain an average of 70 over 100 (passing grade), participate in at least one of the student life clubs and progressively hold positions of responsibility such as treasurer or club representative. The scholarship students also received monthly training and worked in groups to implement a project. This strategy, also known as 'socializing descolarization' (Garcia 2010), allows for

flexibility in study requirements to neutralize the academic game and adapt students to the values of the corporations. The discourse and actions of this program promotes concepts such as collective work, responsibility and engagement regrouped under 'leadership'. The goal of these experiences was to distinguish the beneficiaries, including women, and increase their opportunities at their entry to the job market.

Theoretical framework

Several feminist scholars have worked with Bourdieu's concepts to understand gender relations and identities (Lovell 2004; McNay 2004; Skeggs 2004; McLeod 2005; Nayak and Kehily 2006). The notion of habitus 'understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions integrating past experiences that functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions' (Bourdieu 1977, 82–83), is useful to understand the process of reproduction of gender inequalities in education. For Bourdieu (1977), 'the logic of practice' resides beyond the easy reach of reflexive consciousness.

Heightened capacities towards critical reflexivity are understood to be potentially at issue when there is a lack of fit between habitus and field. While Bourdieu admits that those endowed with a determinate type of disposition are more likely to respond to the dialectical relation between habitus and an objective event, he does not elaborate on variations in experiences at an individual level that explain why some changes in objective structures are more likely to lead to increased possibilities for transforming practices.

In order to complement this concept, we use Lahire's (2011) dispositional framework to illustrate the way in which critical reflexivity emerges. It allows us to examine the socialization process, whereby men and women internalize gendered dispositions, of various types and strengths and the extent to which these are transformable or transferrable to a new situation. Similarly to McCall (1992), we employ the term 'gender dispositions' to refer to the part of an individual's past or incorporated schemas that is structured by gender differentiating socialization modes. As such, we hypothesize that, depending on their prior dispositions, constituting their habitus, students will undergo university socialization differently and this will determine the way in which critical reflexivity emerges or not.

We distance ourselves from the branch of research on reflexivity described by (Adkins 2003, 191) whereby reflexivity is understood as ‘a liberal freedom to question and critically deconstruct the rules and norms which previously governed gender’. We argue instead that through the movement from one field of action (social context of origin) to another (elite university), students deal with the discrepancy between these two fields of action by undergoing a process of negotiation.

Methodology

The field study was conducted between 2010 and 2014 in one of the three comparable universities that received the scholarship program, and aimed through the narratives of the scholarship students, at capturing their biographical trajectories as well as their experiences at university.

This university was selected because it offered the researcher easier access to data. In- depth interviews were conducted with 34 scholarship students (out of a total of 65 scholarship students), all chosen in a way to ensure representation based on geographical origin, gender and major of study. The interviews were repeated at two points in time during their second and last year of study. Only one of the scholarship students (interviewed) dropped out after three semesters.

These interviews allowed me to take into consideration the ‘subjectivity’ of individuals (Dubet 1994), their point of view as social actors who construct dispositions in interaction with the environment. The interview questionnaire consisted of two parts; the first covered the family and school experiences, while the second covered their experiences at university.

To facilitate the fluent expression, the participants were encouraged to express themselves in whichever language they felt most at ease. The interviews thus took place in a mix of Arabic, English and some French and were audio-recorded. The semi-structured interview design allowed formalization and systematization of data collection and comparison between interviews. The interviews with students generated around 535 pages of text in single space.

I applied the thematic method of content analysis detecting and isolating the themes in interviews and comparing with other interviews. The recurrent themes were the ones

that I considered as influential. In addition, I selected the interviews which best articulated the biographies of students with their experience at university – and carried out an analysis ‘by interview’ (Demazière and Dubar [1997] 2004), which consists of coding at three levels taking into account narrative episodes, agents and arguments of participants. This allowed me to understand the sociological process through an analytical posture and to apprehend biographical trajectories. I also analysed data such as evaluation sheets, grades, and student files. Participants’ names used in this paper are pseudonyms and names of concerned institutions are not divulged to protect confidentiality.

Gendered Family Socialization and University Experiences

In this study, a strong divide appeared between women and men with regards to the socialization experiences within families leading to contrasting dispositions, which in turn differentiated students among each other with regards to several dimensions of the university experience (studies, social life and extracurricular activities).

The differences in terms of dispositions that constitute the habitus of scholarship students, based on family culture, influenced university experiences. Students who were from conservative families and subjected to a higher level of control were more likely to place studies at the centre of their interest, which weakened peer influence. Outings to many places were considered incompatible with their religious beliefs. They were less likely to succumb to the attractions of the city and used their free time to study.

The case of Esma, one of the scholarship students, illustrates this. Originally from a Druze village in Mount Lebanon and a conservative family, her father is a State employee in a religious tribunal and wears the traditional outfit. She has two sisters and a brother. Her sisters and she, very protected, only did ‘family trips in the village’. She recalls:

If she [my sister] told my father ‘there’s a group, we are going for a quick stroll’, [he’d answer] ‘group what? Where? No, it’s forbidden!’ Father was very ... it’s forbidden to go down [to Beirut], you see? The whole time, me I remember, he would not let them go down ... my parents, how to tell you, they are not open, I mean we, my parents, were very religious.

She enrolled in biology at university and succeeded. She then went on to medical school with a scholarship at a prestigious university, while the level of control was weaker on her brother and who ended up in dropping out of the university

I mean I don't know maybe the boys they have a bit ... and he was, him and my cousin a little ... he had nothing to do with studies, they would walk around 'we are going out, we are going down [to Beirut], I do not want to study'.

Similarly, in the case of Amira, she was subjected to an important level of control from her mother, while it was not the case among the boys in her family. These were instead influenced by their social environment and peers and gradually lost their interest in studies. At university, having acquired dispositions to ascetism, this young girl invested her time in studies to overcome her difficulties (in English) and managed to figure on the honour list, despite her initial difficulties in English.

The control was sometimes transmitted in the form of religious practices, which also led to the construction of dispositions of ascetism towards studies. Nassima, from a religious family in a village in the South, is veiled, and one of her two brothers had studied in Iran to become a religious 'Sheikh'. She considers herself as a strong believer and considers that her religious practices contributed to her success at school, she says:

Because I am a believer, I had less distractions and thus more time and interest for studies ... The belief, the patience, to be knowledgeable, smart, all of these, they have to do with religion. Everything is linked.

In fact, her religious practice led to restrictions in her daily life, and consequently translated into self-discipline that favoured her success in studies.

Inversely, in the cases where the level of family control was very weak, dispositions were not in favour of academic success. Students, most often young men whose parents were flexible and permissive, were more likely to be influenced by their peers at school. Wael, from a relatively open social environment in a suburb in North of Beirut, spent time with his friends for leisure and concentrated less on his studies, which affected his academic performance negatively. He did not manage to maintain the minimum grade required for the scholarship at university and ended up in losing it after three semesters.

On the other hand, the closeness to conservative values restricted the participation of those students in social and collective activities. The scholarship students entered into a higher education institution in which students are not the same in each course, especially in the business major (as the number of students is high). This made developing social bonds more difficult than at school, where the students stay together in all courses throughout the year. Some of the scholarship students had difficulties in adapting to this new life and to the rules while others easily got used to the independent lifestyle.

The disposition to sociability appeared to largely depend on the degree of autonomy allowed by their family. The women, especially those from conservative families, were largely dependent on their parents to come to university every day. Indeed, the study by Mogueurou, Hamel, and Santelli (2013) demonstrates that immigrant women remain largely dependent on their parents more than men.

Esma for instance, described earlier, from a conservative family from a village in Mount Lebanon, was not allowed to go out alone and remained dependent on her parents until the end of her university years: after classes she had to rush to meet a taxi driver whom her parents arranged to take her back home. Similarly, Nadine, from a village in North Lebanon, was also dropped off at the beginning of every week and picked up at the end of the week by her parents, who were very 'protective of her'. According to the head resident, her father was very afraid of allowing his daughter to use public transport alone. This reduced the time available to socialize at university and thus affected her social autonomy. Similarly, she tended to socialize with peers from similar backgrounds, as was the case of others from the same type of background.

This also affected the time available to engage in extracurricular activities in student clubs. After the meetings, she was always under pressure to go back home as soon as possible with a taxi driver arranged by her parents. During the weekend, her father used to accompany her when she came to Beirut, participate in visits and drive her back home.

The degree of social autonomy of students at university (and acquisition of social capital) appeared to be linked to their context of origin, regarding level of control of the parents, which was gender-based. Multiple dimensions of the experiences of students at

university were shaped by the complex imbrications of different characteristics namely gender, region of origin (urban or rural) and degree of social conservatism, which intersect and produce distinct habitus constituted of a variety of dispositions.

Social Expectations and Career Projections

Social contexts also appeared to dictate gender-based representation of majors and careers within the group of scholarship students. Choice appeared to largely depend on the limits of the accessible projection space, inscribed in a particular social context. Bourdieu ([1998] 2002) states that women were likely to be influenced by the collective expectations towards them which get incorporated in the form of dispositions said ‘feminine’. Sheng (2015), for instance, among others, found statistically significant sex segregation in students’ choices of undergraduate subjects in China which appeared to be mediated by the family habitus.

These findings correspond to the dominant perceptions within their social environment. For instance, Layla, from a village in Mount Lebanon, notes that her mother always asked her to choose a field of study that leads to a job that would allow her to spend her summer with her children, such as a teaching position. She did not seem to be too passionate about her field of studies, Human Resources, which she had chosen based on the possible lighter work schedule. Her mother, she states, encouraged her to work as a ‘teacher’ as it would go with her function as a mother:

Try to do something, my mom liked something: ‘if you have children, you work and you and them together, the summers you are together’.

This appears to have influenced her, as reflected in terms of alternative plans:

I can even take care of human resources in a big school. If everything else fails, I can teach but ...

Nassima as well, a scholarship student from a village in South of Lebanon, recounts the remarks of her mother who discouraged her from choosing ‘something difficult’. She would tell her: ‘do not tire yourself’. We can see here the way in which gender functions within societal practices in implicit ways that are reproduced and normalized overtime, in the choice of majors and careers.

In addition, within the group studied here, an important contrast emerged between science and business majors according to sex; the former was more often preferred by women and the latter by men. These types of majors are opposed in terms of social perceptions and career prospects in the context of Lebanon.

It appeared in this study that a large number of individuals still adhere to the dominant representations in the public opinion in terms of choice of career (Longuenesse 2014). For instance, the field of medical laboratory sciences, which leads to positions as laboratory technicians, was chosen primarily by women (19 women vs. 3 men). The study of biology, mathematics, education and English literature leads to positions as schoolteachers (13 women vs. 5 men).

These majors lead to occupations that correspond to the incorporated 'feminine' dispositions, which explain the stronger interest of women and generally offer weak perspective of ascending mobility if not followed by graduate studies.

In contrast, the field of business leads to lucrative positions in audit, insurance, finance within national or international corporations, all of which offer prospects for professional promotion. Furthermore, the banking sector holds a particular place in the Lebanese society and economy. It hires more fresh graduates and allows them to progress and earn relatively well by the end of the career (Abi Yaghi and Longuenesse 2012).

In such societies, the rigid gender-based division of labour and the ideology of patriarchy are obstacles to the construction of female identities other than wife and mother (Ozyegin 2001). These differences in terms of choice of major also reflected on the career plans among women, namely in terms of predominance of personal projects, such as marriage, or those that are in line with the role of women as wife and mother such as school teachers, paramedical function or bank teller. Indeed, Bourdieu ([1998] 2002) suggests that the women destine themselves preferably towards teaching or paramedical fields so as not to renounce the traditional tasks of women.

We notice however that the gender effect concerning choice of major, attenuated over time. The students in the scholarship program were allowed to change major. As such, a negotiation took place for many of them, through the encounter of the urban world and the interactions with their teachers and peers. After three years of study, though the women had still chosen medical laboratory sciences in larger number than

men, significantly more women than at the entry to university, had embarked in business studies that is more likely to lead to careers with social mobility prospects.

Even when they had not changed the field of study chosen at their entrance to university, many of them changed their future plans. For instance, Maya, a young woman from the southern suburb of Beirut, studying medical laboratory sciences to work in a laboratory, re-evaluated her plans around her third year of study and stated:

I want to do a master's degree in business so that even if I want to continue [to work] in medical laboratory sciences, I want to become the director of a laboratory, not just an employee.

We argue in the next section that the emergence of these changes is a result of their differentiated socialization experience at university, which in turn depended on their prior dispositions.

Mechanisms of Emergence of Critical Reflexivity at University

At university, all students underwent a process of socialization, as described above, as they encountered a new social environment at university. Indeed, when compared to other students at the university, the scholarship students were from a less privileged social background and were more often from rural regions.

These experiences and interactions led to uneven transformations and changes among students depending on their engagement with this environment. In a context of lack of fit between the subjective and objective structures, capacities towards critical reflexivity emerged according to Bourdieu (1977). Several students developed a critical reflexive stance. Archer, Halsall, and Hollingworth (2007) also indicate that a narrative of change was common among the young urban, ethnically diverse working-class young women over the course of the project in her study in the UK. They argue that to undergo a transformation, women had to 'become reflexive guardians of self'. Mennesson (2012), who studies female athletes in France, also highlighted that gender dispositions constructed during childhood could be reinforced and/or transformed in later socialization stages.

In this study, variations emerged in terms of experiences at an individual level, which we explain by examining the socialization process through the movement from one

field of action (social context of origin) to another (elite university) as students deal with the discrepancy between these two fields of action by undergoing a process of negotiation depending on the dispositions that constitute their habitus.

Students, from conservative rural families, not having had exposure to social heterogeneity previously, tended to be much less involved in student life and instead solely focused on their studies. These students, often women, were less likely to develop reflexivity and this reflected on their career projection.

For instance, Layla, mentioned above, from a conservative Druze family in a village in Mount Lebanon, came to university only when needed. Similarly to Esma, mentioned above, she carried out the minimum required amount of effort in collective activities to maintain her scholarship. Her friends were from the same village as her, belonged to the same confessional group and shared the same level of traditionalism. Her experience at university was limited to the academic aspect and she would return home to her family directly after her courses. Once she obtained her business degree, she got married to a young man who took over his father's local supermarket. Her projects changed: she was pregnant shortly after and decided that she would help her husband run the supermarket at the village. This young woman did not leave her hometown prior to coming to university and had not been exposed to a diversity of students. As such, we argue that her past dispositions were particularly strong and continued to be so throughout her university experience, which rendered her less amenable to change.

In some cases, changes appeared during the experience at university in which the students developed reflexivity, but the change to move closer to the university norms was not sustainable and many reversed to prior social expectations and norms. Nassima, described above, is a young Muslim Chiite veiled woman, originally from a conservative village in the South. She is a mathematics student at university and reflects as follows during her interview:

I have ambitions to finish doctorate studies. When I meet a young man, I make sure that he would not stop me. I would like to teach at university and invent something that helps students study mathematics in a simple way. I am convinced that I can do it. I like to be distinguished.

She had been to a socially homogenous school near her house, then to a more diverse high school slightly further away, with a mixed-gender education. As stated above, her religious practice led to restrictions in her daily life allowing for less distractions and more time for studies.

During her first year at university, she did well in her studies and was very active in student life associations. She even took on an acting role in the end-of-year performance at university and had friends from a diversity of student clubs and confessional backgrounds. However, as of the second year, she shut herself off and started only hanging out with young girls from the same confessional group, she withdrew from student clubs but continued to succeed in her studies. In her third year, she signed a marriage contract with a young man from her region, an employee in a cell phone company and during

that period became less and less active. She got married shortly after graduating and continued with a teaching job which is perceived to be compatible with her role as wife and mother.

These results suggest that dispositions acquired through her prior experiences were too strong compared to the socialization process at university. As such, despite her initial attempt at being involved during the first year she was not disposed to develop reflexivity. In such cases, the perceptions of families, who often regarded their university degree as a 'weapon in case of divorce', remained strong.

In contrast, the students who were active and sociable were the most likely to distance themselves from prior social expectations and progressively acquire the norms circulated by the program, especially in business majors. This often resulted in plans for jobs with progression possibility in large corporations in Lebanon or abroad.

In the case of Lamis, veiled Muslim Sunni from Beirut, it appeared that the strict influence of her father, who restricted her engagement in extracurricular activities, was at least partially compensated by her experiences at university. Indeed, though her father was very protective, the values disseminated by the scholarship program progressively impregnated her way of thinking and modified her attitude and her future projects.

She reflects during her interview as follows:

The [leadership] sessions changed a lot the vision I had for my life and for my future, I even used to say before that I will get married and stay at home, that I would not work but now no, I became ... I want to work.

This young woman, from Beirut, had gained dispositions for reflection through her school trajectory: she changed schools, from a conservative one, in which all girls wear the veil after a certain age, to a mixed high school, in an environment where she was no longer like everybody else. This appears to have brought her closer to her experience at university, as she bonded easily with students from various confessional backgrounds and participated actively in collective activities. Upon graduating, she found a job as a coordinator of a similar program at another elite university. As such, it appeared that critical reflexivity often moderated the influence of family with regards to career choices.

It was interesting to note that even some young men, who started off as ‘prisoners of the habitus of their sex’ (Bourdieu [1998] 2002) also developed reflexivity, as in the case of ‘Issam, a young Muslim Sunni man from Beirut, who had changed schools seven times along his trajectory to follow his father who worked as a contractual school teacher.

A girl is to marry and to stay at home, she does not have an opinion, reflexion, nothing, this is something that developed a lot, especially at university, at school it was alright, but at university ... Me, in my head, like my parents, my wife does not work, and it is forbidden for her to do that. Now on the contrary, I depend on the fact that both me and her, we will work together, we want to be able to live, maybe alone I will not be able to make it. Yes, this way of thinking has changed now.

This young man joined a diversity of clubs and was fully engaged, often at the expense of his studies. He formed a very diverse group of friends and was able to benefit from the social heterogeneity of the institution.

One of the factors that distinguish the cases above, namely those of Lamis and ‘Issam, from the case of Layla, was the fact that while all of them had to change schools at least once,¹ the former had experienced changes which appeared to play a significant role in developing their capacity to adapt. Indeed, given the fact that they are from Beirut (the capital), characterized by its diversity in school offer and variety of confessional belongings, their experiences contributed in giving them prior exposure to different social environments and made it more likely for them to adapt to the predominant norms at university. However, in some cases especially from rural areas, such as the one of Layla

and Nassima, despite changes in school, the conservative values in their social environment appeared to be too strong to allow for changes.

The individuals who were most amenable to change appeared to be the ones who had constructed disposition to adaptability, through the heterogeneity of their experience with school changes during their trajectory and social diversity (namely those from urban setting). However, in the cases of individuals from rural conservative backgrounds, the past homogenous dispositions appeared too strong to be changed. Indeed, as Lahire (2011, 2003) argues, the earlier, the more long-lasting, the stronger a socialization process is, the more difficult it is to modify. Despite possible initial reflexivity about their career plans, they tended to change again and conform to the expectations of their social environment after graduation. At the entry to the job market, they rather chose to pursue their own personal projects (such as starting a family, working as a teacher in their community or helping with family business) than projects that fit the norms propagated by the program.

In the particular case of Lebanon, the characteristics of the families of students (relation to traditional values combined with geographical origin) influenced the way in which students chose their field of study, perceived and experienced university and projected into the future. In addition, the strength of prior experiences appeared to influence the dispositions of students to develop and maintain critical reflexivity.

Conclusion

Though this program succeeded in giving a chance to underprivileged women to receive private elite education, gender inequality remained powerful and manifested in different ways. Gender played a determinant role, particularly within socially conservative families, who imposed restrictions on the free time of their daughters. While it proved to be beneficial with regards to their studies at university, it came at the expense of other aspects of their university life and of their aspirations for the future. Consequently, these women could not grasp this opportunity to increase their level of social capital and improve their chances of access to the job market. Indeed, in traditional contexts, expectations towards women as homemaker and mother reflected on differences among students in the way they projected into the future.

This study elaborates on the established links between gender dispositions and higher education by bringing a micro sociological perspective looking at individual experiences, in particular to the question of emergence of critical reflexivity. Rather than a liberal freedom to question and critically deconstruct the rules and norms, it demonstrates that critical reflexivity is itself rooted in the habitus and involves a process of negotiation between the socialization processes prior to university, and those at university.

Indeed, by delving into the process through which reflexivity is developed from a dispositional approach (Lahire 2011), we demonstrate that emergence and sustainability of ‘critical reflexivity’ depended on the weight of previous dispositions. Degree of social conservatism, exposure to change and to social heterogeneity (through geographical origin and/or change of school) played a mediating role in terms of adaptability and enabled reflexivity. These results demonstrate that one cannot consider gender aside from socio-economic background and geographical origin. Indeed, it appeared that this scholarship program, aiming to give equal opportunities to women and men, reproduced inequalities as individuals with social backgrounds that corresponded the closest to the university norms, were the ones who adhered the most closely to its expectations.

The case of Lebanon is interesting in understanding construction of gender inequality due to the diversity of family profiles and cultures concentrated in a small country and due to the contradiction between it being qualified as the ‘most westernized Arab nation’ yet presenting with high rates of unemployment among women. Interestingly, religious affiliation to which gender inequalities are often attributed, mattered less than other variables including degree of social conservatism within the family, religious practice or geographical origin. The behaviour of Amira, from a Muslim Chiite at university closely resembled that of Nadine and Esma, respectively from a Christian Maronite and Druze family, from a rural origin.

The results of this study point at the fact that the construction of dispositions and emergence of critical reflexivity must be seen as a complex and fluid process of negotiation that vary in time, depending on the contexts and the relational dynamics. As such, these findings invite a re-design of initiatives in a context and gender sensitive way

taking into account the role of gender within the particular social location in which it is implemented.

Notes

- 1- In the public sector in Lebanon, it is not possible to carry out the entire school trajectory in the same school. Some schools include primary and complementary, others complementary and secondary or secondary alone.

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