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Book Review

Amélie Le Renard. **Western Privilege: Work, Intimacy, and Postcolonial Hierarchies in Dubai** (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021). pp. 256. \$26.00 paperback. ISBN:9781503629233

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Western Privilege overlooks a sociological perspective on the Western expats' hegemony who are the privileged ones in Dubai from a feminist postcolonial perspective. The researcher Amélie Le Renard emphasizes transformations and reproduction of hierarchies that interlink race, nationality, gender, and sexuality. The researcher demonstrates concessions and privileges for the employees and the white collars who have Western passports and non-white employees and working class from other countries. Having a Western European passport reproduces the hierarchical division of labor in favor of getting well-paid, having higher positions, easier career jumping, and redoubling or rapid salary increase for Westerners in the job market, and having more working hours as opposed to getting less paid within resident permit problems for non-Westerners.

To develop her arguments and hypotheses, Amélie Le Renard consists directly of the white collars' self-testimonies who work and live in Dubai. She asserts that "The forms of hierarchical ranking of nationalities structure the job market and their role in the production of Westerners as a privileged social group. Most of the city's inhabitants fall under the status of 'temporary worker,' which makes their residency conditional upon a work contract (p.23)."

The book is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter is about how Western residents benefit from structural advantages. It displays "the nature of such advantages can vary; higher salaries, faster career paths, higher positions, all in a job market where salaried positions are differentiated according to nationality" (p.25-30). The second chapter centers on the reproduction of these structural advantages for Westerner salaries via recruitment and management practices. Chapter 3 examines the Westerners' special physical and emotional labor of self-presentation and the acquisition of soft skills and the importance of self-presentation (clothing, makeup, exercise, plastic surgery), posture and movement, voice intonation, and even accent and speech mannerisms which are more crucial than university degree for the "right-look" in the city of Dubai which is represented as a "global city that attracts whites but also as a multicultural city, open and tolerant—a city where wealthy and sophisticated people from a variety of cultures cross paths, all in a soothing climate of security" (p.75-77). Chapter 4 to 6 further explore the intersections between class, race, nationality, gender, and sexuality by studying how lifestyles and distinctive forms of intimacy

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are constructed. Chapter 4 focuses on the formation of distinctly Western intimate subjectivities who impact differentiated and hierarchized social groups' construction. This chapter examines as Le Renard mentioned: "the organization of intimacy within Western heterosexual couples and their children, called "guest families," who identify with a distinctive hetero conjugality by means of specific masculinities and femininities" (119-120). Chapter 5 extends the analysis of this egalitarian posture by focusing on what these couples—the wife in particular—have to say about employing domestic workers, a practice from which they attempt to distance themselves, all the while personally implicated as employers. Chapter 6 explores the equally ambivalent attitude of single Western residents with migrant status toward Dubai nightlife: many of them say they go out regularly, though their statements about their hedonistic lifestyles and their temporality. Finally, chapter 7 compares and contrasts the experiences of non-White versus white Western passport holders to demonstrate the extent to which the experience of Western privilege is a situated one that varies according to people's position within the social hierarchy of race, class, and gender. Some individuals who experienced discrimination in their country of origin praise the city's enfranchising multiculturalism, while many whites describe Dubai as a "caste society".

The increase in the flow of migrants to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council with oil drilling and commercialization, by the 1950s, intensified in the 1970s, the economic diversification boom of the 2000s came along with the arrival of an ever-increasing number of nationals from other Western countries. The book considers privileges as "structural advantages including career jumping" for Westerners who have an expat contract in the job market in Dubai. Several Western companies had a "pyramidal structure: executive functions were held by men holding Western passports, while the middle and lower portions of the pyramid, where many of the jobs are considered unskilled, were occupied mostly by citizens of Asian countries" (p.50). Hence, the position of privilege constructs gender and sexuality relations within the group of Westerners (discusses in chapter 7). They shape specific forms of heterosexuality, characterized by a sharp labor division and women's financial dependence (p.57). The book displays within the interviews that Westerners, mostly white men, as an advantaged group become privileged in the salary differential, career jumping, forms of horizontal and vertical segmentation, and management styles. Contrary, the working class from non-Western countries consider Dubai as a "waiting room" before migrating elsewhere, especially to Europe or North America.

Western Privileged provides an "uncustomary consideration of theoretical questionings regarding Western hegemony by showing what Westernness actually does today in practice, in a global city of a non-hegemonic country" (p.208). Westernness is mobilized by a set of people to rank, hierarchize, legitimate, justify, regroup, and set boundaries. The book displays that the conditions of access to these privileged lifestyles stem from a combination of postcoloniality and neoliberalism, shaping an urban society that, while ostensibly peaceful multiculturalism as deployed in the highly controlled public spaces of the city, is unequal. The image of Dubai as "tolerant and cosmopolitan" is described as a *multicultural city* by Westerners who may sometimes find Dubai "quasi-artificial" and fake. Unequal as it is, this social order allows successful professional careers (such as non-elite Western Europeans with migrant backgrounds) for people who were discriminated against in their home countries. This social order can be open, even liberating to them because they are Western passport holders, neither whiteness nor socialization in the upper class is a prerequisite for gaining access to relatively privileged positions, even if those remain conditions for accessing the most privileged



positions. Non-white Westerners' experiences invite us to put into perspective unequal social orders in different contexts, rather than exceptionalize Dubai's unequal social order. During all chapters, we understand how Westerners and non-Westerner employees reproduce all hierarchical mechanisms and legitimize *Western privilege* within their speech and self-testimonies. Thus, the book displays that persons structurally advantaged via their passports are not outsiders in Dubai society. From the moment they arrive, most adapt at remarkable speed to the dominant position as *Western privilege* that is theirs in Dubai. These persons did play a role in perpetuating the social order that structurally favours Western passport holders, the ranking criterion that remains key despite the continual turnover of residents.

Finally, I think that Amélie Le Renard has brought together fruitful and comprehensive interviews with Western/non-Western, White/non-White employees working in Dubai to discuss her arguments and hypotheses in her book. The expats' own testimonies give an overview of the Westerners' lifestyles in Dubai. The book provides thorough research for the researchers who study the sociology of migration, international migration studies, postcolonial studies, global cities, gender studies, heteronormativity, and expat lifestyles.