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MohaEnnanji & Fatima Sadiqi (Eds.) *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*. London/New York: Routledge. 2011.

In the last decade, war has moved to all places in the Middle East; in recent times, street-protest and civil-war have brought much of the focus in the region to North Africa, specifically. Even as the horrors of war are recounted daily, however, there remain other stories that are rarely told: How do women survive or fight war? Is war-violence the only form of violence that is known to them? What are observers to make of the many images of weak, wailing women and the gun-brandishing, suicide-bombers? Is war so prevalent in the lives of women that the notion of ‘war-crimes’ against them is but a metaphor for myriad forms of violence? How do women respond to violence or its perpetrators? Where do women locate themselves? These questions are of ongoing concern, but due to the recent spotlight on the Middle East, they currently acquire special significance.

Gender and Violence in the Middle East is a significant collection of essays addressing many of the questions outlined above. Published under the aegis of the UCLA Center for Middle East Development series on Middle East security and cooperation, this volume consists of fourteen chapters, divided into six specific sections, covering the broad expanse of Middle East and North Africa—Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, Turkey, Algeria and Morocco. The work tries to understand the multi-shades of violence and how violence intersects gender. It takes a broad look at the structural and cultural nuances of gender discrimination, which, as the editors write in their introduction, “wear[s] multiple faces in this region, where tradition, social norm, religion, war, and politics intermingle in a powerful and tantalizing space-based patriarchy”(1).

In the opening essay, Patricia Zuckerhut argues that local contexts are important underpinnings in understanding the universal concept of violence and that culture-specific concepts make it difficult to compare issues of violence (especially violence vis-à-vis gender) across cultures. Such concepts, she warns, should be treated with caution, as they can contribute to the “othering” of individuals in “foreign” cultures and, in turn, contribute to a form of “epistemic violence” (13). While considering the symbolic, structural and psychological constructs of violence, she also underlines the critical importance of evaluating the notions that legitimize acts of violence, from enforced sexuality in marriage (a husband’s “right” and wife’s “duty” to perform sexual acts) to the notion of honor being tied to woman’s body (not her own honor as a person but that of her family and community). The author also contends that “violence is never without sense or meaning” and should be seen as an act of “cultural performance” (23).

The next two chapters elaborate upon the structural and cultural constructions of violence in Palestine. Shaloub-Kevorkian strongly contests any constructions of “race” based stereotype, particularly those derived from conceptions of “orientalism, colonialism and Zionism” perpetuated by colonizing forces (and wartime occupiers), who seek to create “fear” both *among* and *of* the “feared.” Toward that end, the author de-historicizes stories that racialize Philistine-women as “terrorists,” “suicide-bombers,” or “mothers-of-martyrs,” identities that are placed upon them to make the women themselves “feared,” ultimately placing women’s very “bodies, education, sexuality, and [lives] . . . under siege” (58). The essay suggests the ways in which this “fear” of women in fact consolidates patriarchy by effectively withdrawing women from public view and demanding of them both compliance and subservience behind private walls. Furthermore, the author argues, within the context of war, the structural violence (of poverty, hunger, exclusion, humiliation) additionally and “inevitably translates into intimate and domestic violence” against women (22), meaning that during times of war, women must endure “multi-layered sufferings” (41). Compounding this suffering is the fact that the current constructions of resistance available to Middle Eastern women fall short of enabling them to effectively combat such suffering. On the contrary, the author says, current modes of resistance serve to consolidate “religious, conservative and patriarchal modes of resistance” (45). For this reason, the author claims that new notions of resistance that more accurately reflect the gendered nature of both violence and resistance must be conceptualized.

Islah Jad, in her essay, describes the lack of opportunities for social interaction among youth in occupied Palestine. Due to the lack of social-institutional support for girls and women, she says, girls

must secure themselves by marriage, while the educated boys are permitted to migrate in order to build their careers and lives away from the environment of war and resistance. Islah suggests that the isolation of women may be overcome by increasing their social interaction through cultural and sporting activities. She also questions the methodologies of studies focused on the social interactions among (and isolation of) Palestinian girls and women, as such studies tend to aggregate data across all communities and apply findings universally to all Palestinian women, leading, she contends, to the formulation of inappropriate policy for many communities. Drawing upon the case-studies she conducted in Gaza and West-Bank, Jad suggests that data should instead be *disaggregated* by region (rural, urban, and refugee camp) and that the means by which target groups are delineated should “follow the ever-changing situation on the ground” (60). She makes a valid point that data should be further disaggregated in relation to time-exposed-to-violence/occupation, as individuals with “prolonged exposure to violence exhibit a tendency to internalize violence and reproduce it locally,” which has differing impacts on different localities (60).

The next three essays compare the attitudinal changes toward women that result from war. For example, Lamia Shehadeh demonstrates how the Israeli occupation of Lebanon (1975-91) propelled women from “their homes into the public sphere,” which triggered “their ultimate liberation from their traditional and patriarchal chains” (81). During the occupation, there was a spurt of women-writers and painters, who found creating artistic works cathartic. There was also an increase in the enrollment of women in universities and increased participation among women in the labor market, though neither trend continued its upward spiral after the war. Like Shehadeh, Achim Rohde navigates changes in gender rhetoric from the 1968 (which saw women as integral to the “project of building a modern Iraqi Arab nation”) (97) to the rhetoric of “traditionalist gender politics” at the height of Iran-Iraq war, which, in its promotion of Islamic values and Bedouin culture (99), emphasized the rhetoric of “core family values” and placed the burden of the “ideology of [honor] and shame” squarely on the shoulders of women (99). Finally, Anne Brodsky presents the multifaceted forms of violence against women in Afghanistan, where gender relations were negatively reversed in the 1970s. Violence against women in Afghanistan, with all imagined restrictions and barbarism, did not start with Taliban but had been entrenched there since 1973 due to conservative interpretations of Islam and multiple tribal customs. To mitigate violence against women in Afghanistan, she advocates local intervention rather than overt emphasis on “capacity building” (133).

Comparative gender-freedom, followed by a backlash against it within Middle Eastern nations in the 1970s (as illustrated by the Mujahiddin and Taliban in Afghanistan, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and FIS in the 1980s Algeria) is also discussed by Valentine Moghadam. These movements aimed to “restore” the Islamic moral and political order to “westoxicated” women resulted in the restriction of women’s public roles and increased domestic and intimate violence. Certain feminist organizations in Pakistan, Jordan and Algeria, however, developed a Koran-based movement challenging patriarchal interpretations of religiously-based “morality,” offering alternative readings in refutation of both “Western stereotypes and Islamist orthodoxy alike” (149).

Sherifa Zuhur cautions that gender issues and violence are informed by the positions taken by both Islamists (votaries of radical Islam) and secularists (who subscribe to a civil-legal-system in which religion is private). Excluded altogether from the discourse surrounding issues of gender and violence are any Muslims or non-Muslims who believe in religion as a liberal tradition; for this “heresy,” they are bullied out of the debate entirely. The author laments that the secularists’ strategy lacks any clear indication that they are “winning battles for women or enabling them to win battles” (156), while Islamists, she says, continue to manipulate the religious-legal system to deny any reforms or redress (on issues of leadership, polygyny, divorce, or domestic violence) by equating secular tendencies with “apostasy” (the abandoning of religious principles). Collecting data from studies concluded on all regions of the Arab world, she contends that domestic-violence is scarcely reported and that women have limited access to divorce, the only way to escape severe spousal-violence. Issues of domestic violence are also the overriding issues in the medico-legal dimensions of violence. Cari Clark, for instance, argues that there is direct correlation between physical-violence and disease manifestation in Jordan, where wife-beating is an accepted form of domestic violence, such that 69% to 87% women themselves justify domestic

violence in one or another context. Her study confirms that the high level of physical violence toward women and control of women's bodies often takes the form of marital rape, which, from the male perspective, is understood as the intention to impregnate his wife (as the size of one's family is considered a sign effective control over women and of social capital) (186).

Building a strong feminist movement and public discourse against gender-related violence may change this situation, as discussed by Ilkkaracan and Amado about Turkey. After the civil-reforms of 1980, which established spousal equality, a movement targeting issues relating to women's autonomy over their bodies and intending to combat "customary practices that aim to control women's sexuality" was launched (191). Eventually, the 2001 civil code provided for "equal matrimonial property" (193), raised woman's marriageable age to 17, and criminalized marital-rape and honor-killing. Still, legal-proceedings have only infrequently been resorted to, as victims often know their perpetrators and are hesitant to report them. Between the years of 2000 and 2005, of those incidents of violence that were reported, 88% of the reported perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence were known to their victims (196).

Similar reforms in Morocco, where the 2004 Family-code provided for joint spousal responsibility for the family and a new labor law promoting women's independent entrepreneurship without their husbands' consent, has resulted in little change, as discussed by Moha Ennaji. Though the raising of a woman's marriageable age and resulting decrease in fertility are victories not to be understated, polygyny has not altogether been eradicated, nor has the tradition of the shari'a-based inheritance been abandoned. High female illiteracy, low enrollment in education, wage-discrimination, high maternal-mortality, and meager post-natal assistance all remain disturbing realities for Middle Eastern women, where domestic and sexual violence continue to be considered "private matter[s]" (209). These failures find context in Fatima Sadiqi's linguistic and cultural insights regarding Moroccan society, which is highly oral, with high female illiteracy. The author claims that female illiteracy is fundamental to the inability of Moroccan women to counter the subtle, ideological war that has created gendered stereotypes intended to exclude women from the public sphere. As "society is built around clear role assignments" (225), women who adhere to patriarchal expectations (i.e. by demonstrating obedience and completing domestic work) are lauded. The very same expectations discourage women from assuming leadership roles or doing public work (229). Such expectations are derived from stereotyped gender roles, perpetuated by the exclusively masculine imagery of the "struggle-media" (in the form of cartoons, posters, popular-images), in which the roles of women are circumscribed to domestic identities: as mothers, beloveds, and "peasant-woman" (241). Nadia Yaqub dismantles these stereotypes, filtering them through the lens of films directed by Palestinian women, who catapult the cost of gendered-violence—both physical and psychological—from the personal to the public sphere. These women confront "the violence of occupation constructively, thereby rendering . . . acts of daily life into a form of resistance" (233), where homemaking itself symbolizes resistance to the violence outside and where steadfastness and defiance are valorized. The message of the films these women produce, says the author, ultimately serves to portray the way in which conflict inflates the distance between people.

This work is an articulate collection that probes diverse manifestations of violence and the impact of violence on gender-relations in both the public and intimate spheres. Though the essays focus on issues of violence specific to the Middle East, the essays address universal concerns and offer insights into the process of patriarchal control and consolidation in the face of external aggression or internal dissonance. Consistently argued and clearly written, the book would be useful to both specialists and students alike.

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