

# WOMEN OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Fatma Müge Göçek

'Knowledge and experience,' I thought. 'I have to include local experience along with critical knowledge.' This was my first thought when I was asked by Routledge to compile a four-volume reader on women of the Middle East. After all, women and the Middle East have for so long represented the two 'others' in the field of social sciences and humanities, with the categories of men and the West dominating knowledge construction universally. There were two ways to counter such domination: first, approach knowledge construction critically; and, second, draw upon local experience to bring in alternative sites of knowledge. The focus on experience is, of course, a fortuitous contribution of feminist theory to social analysis in general, and gender analysis in particular. Only such focus enables scholars to move beyond the confines of patriarchy to bring in the world as it is observed and negotiated – in short, experienced by women. And the fact that knowledge is socially constructed became painfully evident during the Holocaust when the German Nazi state employed knowledge intentionally for the destruction of humankind. It was then that scholars realized the necessity approaching all knowledge critically, to ensure that it did not promote the interests of certain groups and institutions at the expense of those of others.

When I approached the context of the Middle East within this framework, my main challenge was to critically combine the concepts of knowledge and experience in a way that would convey the complexities of the lives of women of the Middle East, past and present. I had to make sure that the local experiences of women were at the forefront of analysis, and that the authors approached existing knowledge on the women of the Middle East critically. In this general introduction, I first discuss the elements of knowledge construction in relation to women of the Middle East, and then bring in their experiences to demonstrate the local knowledge such contextualization generates across time and place. I conclude with a short explanation of my selection process followed by brief summaries of the four volumes' contents.

## Knowledge on women of the Middle East

Elements that shape knowledge on women in general and Middle Eastern women in particular are co-eval with the emergence of the social sciences in



the middle of the nineteenth century in Western Europe. It was during this time, in the larger context of the Enlightenment, that reason replaced religion, science prevailed over belief, and urban became the centre of social action at the expense of the rural. It was thus in this era that Western modernity emerged, combining the British industrial and French political revolutions in a manner that enabled the West to expand and dominate the rest of the world, including the Middle East.

How were women impacted by this vast transformation? Western European men not only dominated the public sphere, but also controlled women's activities within and outside. Women were additionally disadvantaged in the public sphere because they did not have the right to vote; as such, they had no say over the parameters according to which Western states and societies were organized. Within such mass participation, the norms and values of the majority – defined as those who had more power than the rest – dominated over the rest, with the public discourse advocating family-oriented and hetero-normative behaviour that reproduced the status quo. Western European women often appeared within this discourse in their particular capacity as urban middle-class wives and daughters; working-class and rural women were there as well, but their participation went unacknowledged. Hence the Enlightenment ideology favoured certain social actors over others, often favouring the powerful at the expense of the rest. Indeed, the binarisms of science–ideas, reason–belief, behaviour–emotion, urban–rural, secular–religious, public–private, majority–minority, heteronormativity–homonormativity, male–female came together to generate a public discourse that intentionally privileged the former component (science, reason, behaviour, urban, secular, public, majority, heteronormativity, male) over the latter component (ideas, belief, emotion, rural, religious, private, minority, homonormativity, female). As such, women became epistemologically trapped as the ‘other’ of men, losing their ability to articulate their presence and agency in the public sphere.

The dreadfully destructive experience of the Holocaust during the Second World War finally destabilized the stronghold of these binarisms over state and society. Ultimately, the systematic destruction undertaken by the Nazi state and government demonstrated the danger of the hegemony of the public sphere: science, reason, behaviour, the urban, secular, majority and heteronormativity were employed by the Nazis to destroy all opposition. They subverted the Enlightenment ideology of science and reason for the progress of humankind, employing it to further the particular interests of the Nazi state at all costs, at the expense of the universal interests of humanity. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the anxiety generated by the rise of fascism and the concurrent unleashing of such collective violence gradually led to the consolidation of critical thinking in general and the Frankfurt School of critical theory in particular.

This post-enlightenment critical thinking also destabilized the epistemologically confined location of women in social analysis. Women's activities

in the private, rural, religious, emotional spheres were re-articulated, and their silenced presence in the public, urban, secular, scientific and rational critically re-examined. In this manner, critical thinking helped chart a new approach under the broad spectrum of feminism: the male hegemony was gradually destabilized, first through disclosing the manner in which knowledge about women had been socially constructed by men to the detriment of women, then as studying women as a field became legitimate in and of itself, thereby moving beyond the confines of male hegemony to generate knowledge by and for women. Sources employed in this new approach also differed: formal state, government and business documents that privileged men and suffocated women were complemented by informal sources such as songs, poetry, fiction, memoirs, artworks and everyday practices that were infused with women's standpoint and meaning production. This is where theory and research regarding women stand in the Western world.

How do these issues compare to those in the rest of the world, the non-West that does not share the Western European historical experience but is nevertheless strongly impacted by the West? The temporal and spatial particularities of the Western European framework often translate into shortcomings of the non-West. In our particular case, even the term ‘Middle East’ entails a social construction of knowledge based on a power inequality: even the region itself is spatially defined by Western Europe as it merely differentiates what lies in the Far East from the Middle East. And what comprises the boundaries of the Middle East is equally unclear because of this haphazard construction: some scholars include in the region North Africa and parts of Africa, others extend it to Afghanistan and Central Asia, while still others expand it south to southwest Asia. In this book, I employ the term Middle East to specifically refer to the classically identified lands of Asia Minor and the Arabian Peninsula, including Egypt. And I will also include the Middle Eastern Diasporas throughout the world because these too are social spaces now informed and shaped by initial Middle Eastern practices.

How and where are women located within this spatially ambiguous realm? Once again, the inherent comparison with the Western European historical experience led scholars to focus on the differences instead of similarities, and to then interpret such differences as detrimental. Hence, for instance, highlighting Middle Eastern women's ‘absence’ in the public sphere – and silencing their presence in everyday life, at home and in the community – inevitably led to the categorization of women of the Middle East as oppressed. Indeed, scholars working within Western European modernity initially approached Middle Eastern women spatially and temporally, as belonging to the non-West, professing a non-Christian religion and living a non-Western lifestyle. Such differentiation not only objectified Middle Eastern women, thereby enabling and justifying their submission by the West, but also prevented them from joining their Western counterparts to question and revolt against their common, universal oppression around the globe.

Only in the last couple of decades has the study of women of the Middle East started to benefit from the post-enlightenment critical thinking discussed above. It was specifically Edward Said (1978) who articulated, in his influential work entitled *Orientalism*, the 'othering' of the Middle East by Western European scholars. Even though Said did not explicitly discuss the Eurocentric perception of women of the Middle East, many scholars have since then articulated and challenged the Orientalist tropes based solely on difference, viewing women strictly through the lenses of religion, veiling, restriction and the like. Here, since I base the volumes on this new critical approach, I start off by critically challenging the Western-centric construction of knowledge on women of the Middle East. I then move on to the concept of experience because it exclusively focuses on the production of local meaning that ultimately imbues Middle Eastern women with agency.

### **Experiences of women of the Middle East**

While knowledge is often based on discrete, observable acts, experience refers instead to a *process*, one that is suffused, in addition to action, with emotions, ideas, norms and values. And experience is especially significant in capturing the meaning-making processes women engage in: as women interact with their environment across time and space, their interpretations reveal their agency. It is no accident that feminist scholars such as Joan Wallace Scott, Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill Collins have all emphasized the significance of experience alongside knowledge to underscore how women should acquire agency to create their own realities, on their own terms and in their own words. Experience as a concept is particularly significant in studying the women of the Middle East because it enables scholars to avoid the lure of Orientalist tropes, moving on to observe and listen to Middle Eastern women living their own lives in accordance with their own realities.

There is one caveat in employing the concept of experience, however, especially when it interacts with knowledge. All too often, knowledge acts to constrict the boundaries of experience, thereby limiting the scholars' focus to experiences of the rational, urban, scientific, secular and heteronormative, often conveyed by formal texts that have selectively survived the test of time. Overlooked in the process would be the emotional, ideological, religious, homonormative and the minority experience, often released through songs, poetry and contrapuntal readings of formal texts. Hence, one again needs to approach Middle Eastern women's local experiences critically, carefully noting how they are located in the context of space and time. Also significant in this context is critical self-reflexivity, that is, the constraints my own identity as an urban, secular, heteronormative woman scholar who was born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey, places upon me. These aspects in general, and the critical assessment of knowledge and experience in particular, formulated the main parameters around which I constructed the four volumes.

### **Main points of the selection process**

Three processes guided the selection process, articulating the temporal and spatial context, including the marginalized, and bringing in new sources that specifically highlighted women's lives. Contextualization was necessary to overcome the limitations set by Western European modernity and Orientalism. Western European modernity temporarily privileges the present over the past, thereby naturalizing its hegemony. I specifically focused on the temporal dimension, trying to recover women's presence and experiences in the Middle East through the ages, from the ancient to the present. Then, in order to counter the manner in which Orientalist tropes are often formed by delinking women from their environment, I specifically problematized the spatial dimension by making sure that I focused on as many different spaces as possible, ranging from the urban to the rural to the mountainous, and from Asia Minor to the Arabian Peninsula to the Gulf countries. This range also captured the variation in and complexity of Middle Eastern women's experiences, thereby once again undermining the trope of the singular Muslim woman.

I was also cognizant of specific patterns of exclusion in analysing women of the Middle East. In terms of religion, the almost complete emphasis in the field on orthodox religion overlooks the very significant and vibrant heterodox practices where especially women play socially important roles. So I included as many instances outside the dominant Sunni practices as possible. In addition, minority religions of the region such as Christianity and Judaism are also disregarded; I made a point of including women from all religions in the region. In terms of politics, not only do women from larger countries such as Egypt and Iran dominate at the expense of smaller ones, but Israel, which is certainly a part of the Middle East, is often excluded for political reasons. Yet women are present all over the Middle East regardless of such political barriers, so I incorporated work on all countries as long as women comprised the social actors of the analysis.

I knew that it was necessary to bring in new sources to reveal the complexity of Middle Eastern women's lives. I went beyond state-centric studies based almost exclusively on state-collected statistics to reach women's interactions with music, arts, architecture, professions and the like. The wide range of activities women of the Middle East engage in that I surveyed also captured the breadth of their experience. Another element regarding sources on women of the Middle East was the abundance of literature regarding their religion, covering and the veil as if these women had no other lives, did not work, shop, have children, or did not express their opinions on anything, political or social. I therefore decided to pose the challenges women of the Middle East faced not by highlighting their differences, but instead underscoring their similarities with other women throughout the world. As such, I analysed the economic, political and social challenges women of the Middle East faced, just as women did anywhere else in the world. This framework based on similarity highlighted much more clearly the significance of culture in fine-tuning these challenges. Finally, in articulating the possible solutions women

and Part 2.2 surveys women's revolutionary activities especially in generating novel spaces for themselves within religious movements. And, finally, Part 3 approaches Middle Eastern women's social challenges. The three sections emerge as health, the life course and education, within which women negotiate meaning. In all, then, Volume III articulates the challenges women of the Middle East face within an analytical framework that enables comparison with women throughout the world, but it does so by also highlighting the specific issues Middle Eastern women are concerned with in each challenge. In doing so, the volume introduces specificities of Middle Eastern women's issues without 'othering' them as culturally unique activities.

The final volume, Volume IV, discusses the possible solutions to the issues that have been challenging women of the Middle East. It commences in Part 1 with a survey of the solutions and future directions that have been offered by prominent scholars in the field. Part 2 surveys the most recent research in the field to identify the areas within which novel solutions may emerge: these four areas are feminisms, sexualities, Diasporas and technologies. As such, Part 2.1, on feminisms, critically studies Islamic and Kurdish feminisms as these particular movements generate new spaces for women in state and civil society. Part 2.2, on sexualities, highlights the manner in which heteronormativity in the Middle East has been challenged, especially in the last decade, thereby creating a new space by approaching sexuality in general and women's sexuality in particular in a manner that covers hitherto silenced aspects of women's sexual identities. Part 2.3, on Diasporas, refers to the twenty-first century phenomena of escalating worldwide migrations that diffuse women of the Middle East throughout the world. Their experiences in Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia capture how certain beliefs and practices travel across space. Finally, Part 2.4, on technologies, also highlights the impact on women of new, especially virtual, spaces. Middle Eastern women's online presence generates, for instance, new possibilities of action as well as challenges. In all then, Volume IV presents and discusses future venues and spaces where women of the Middle East could be active, successfully developing solutions in the process.

As I conclude this general introduction, let me note that the amount of research regarding women of the Middle East that I was able to analyse and present here captures only a small segment of what is out there. I therefore decided to add to each volume an additional bibliography citing the articles and sources I surveyed but could not include in the volumes due to space limitations. I hope all this would enable you, the reader, to enjoy learning about the women of the Middle East as much as I did in developing the volumes.

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of the Middle East posed to the challenges, I once again underscored similarity, and the emergent areas of feminisms, sexualities, Diasporas and technologies indeed revealed that Middle Eastern women's ideas and actions coincided with the issues posed by women throughout the world.

In summary, then, I think that my critical engagement with the concepts of knowledge and experience in the context of the women of the Middle East enabled me to analytically capture the breadth and depth of Middle East women's agency, including their meaning and knowledge production. Still, what I covered here represents only a small portion of the vast literature that is available to readers; the selection of the material reflects my own biases.

## Contents of the four volumes

The organization of the four volumes reflects the parameters discussed above, that is, critically bringing together knowledge and experience to analyse women of the Middle East in a manner that captures the complexities of their lives across time and space. Volume I starts off by focusing on knowledge construction in relation to women of the Middle East. Part 1 deconstructs the inherent Orientalism in existing analyses by highlighting the works of leading scholars. Then Part 2 specifically takes on the Orientalist tropes in two sections, with Part 2.1 concentrating on religion and Islam, and Part 2.2 critically studying the harem and veiling. In summary, Volume I flags the existing biases in approaching women of the Middle East with the intention of overcoming them.

Volume II then moves on to develop a new framework within which to actually focus on women of the Middle East as they make meaning – it homes in on their experiences. The analysis proceeds once again in two parts. Part 1 critically locates women of the Middle East making meaning within society at large, across time and space. Part 2 articulates the meaning-making process by concentrating on three particular social spaces. Part 2.1 emphasizes women's activities in relation to the fine arts, Part 2.2 concentrates on women of the Middle East and fiction and Part 2.3 on non-fiction. In all, then, Volume II spans the wide range of activities women of the Middle East engage in, from writing autobiographies and screenplays, attending soccer games and playing drums to making movies. While doing so, however, it also pays attention to the critical silences to ensure one depiction does not overwhelm the other.

Within this context of knowledge (Volume I) and experience (Volume II) of women of the Middle East, Volume III delves into the issues challenging women. No longer fettered by Orientalist tropes and cognizant of women's activities within society at large, the volume adopts the classic tripartite of economic, political and social challenges employed throughout the globe to study the activities of humankind. Part 1 discusses the economic challenges in the three sections of work, development and consumption. Part 2 takes on the political challenges women of the Middle East face in two sections, against the hegemony and for revolution. So Part 2.1 identifies women's struggles against the hegemonic structures of law, state and the nation,

of the Orientalist approach to capture the complexity of Middle Eastern women's lives across time and space. Tucker calls attention to the fact that the idealist and empiricist analyses of texts failed to differentiate what was formally stated (theory) from what was actually practised on the ground (action) (Chapter 3). Reading nineteenth century court records against the grain, she is able to locate women in Middle Eastern history on their own terms rather than by what was patriarchally prescribed for them. Khazzoom's article moves to the mid twentieth century, analysing how Iraqi Jews in general and women in particular immigrated to Israel in the 1950s (Chapter 4). She cogently demonstrates the manner in which the Israeli state employed Orientalism to adversely shape what they considered to be Eastern and therefore traditional Jewish women's life chances. Hence, in addition to the West Orientalizing the rest, Khazzoom demonstrates that modernizing states like Israel also employed the same criteria to discriminate against particular groups in their midst. Soraya Altorki instead reflects upon what a woman scholar's studying her own society entails, in her case women in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia (Chapter 5). She points out that not only was she able to access women's domestic relations that outsiders rarely have access to, but she also documented how 'Saudi Arabian women [are] far from the passive and oppressed group' (p. 75) suggested by most Orientalist accounts. Altorki therefore reveals how the Orientalist discourse on women of the Middle East fails to capture women's agency because it looks for it in the wrong place, not in the private sphere but the public one, because the latter is where Western women are depicted as practising their agency.

Nadje Al-Ali's study moves on to an analysis of the changing position of women in Iraq from the mid-1950s to the present (Chapter 6). She challenges the neo-Orientalist explanations of women's location in terms of culture or religion and instead explores the impact of local economic, political and social processes. Al-Ali finds that, like everywhere else in the world, 'social class, place of origin, and political orientation cut across ethnic and religious boundaries [to] present the main markers of difference (p. 93)'. Sophia Pandya focuses on the relationship of women and religion, but does so from the vantage point of local women (Chapter 7); she specifically highlights the changing significance of a religious space for women in Bahrain. Even though the Shi'i religious centre (*ma'lam*) was traditionally used for religious purposes alone, Pandya points out that the Shi'i women of Bahrain are now employing it to empower themselves by getting legal, social and health education there as well as engaging in political activism.

In all, then, Part 1 moves beyond the confines of Orientalism to reveal the complexity of women's lives in the Middle East. It demonstrates that knowledge constructed about women should not reduce them to their religious and cultural difference, but instead focus on the richness of their experience across time and space. It surveys this complexity by tracing women's experiences in the Egyptian court records and studying them at present as they migrate to Israel, live in Saudi Arabia, face adversity in Iraq or re-purpose religious spaces in Bahrain.

Part 2 specifically takes on the Orientalist tropes that have been employed to 'other' the women of the Middle East. While articles in Part 2.1 challenge and

## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME I

### *Fatma Müge Göçek*

How has knowledge on women of the Middle East been constructed in the past and at present? Volume I takes Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) as the point of departure to articulate the manner in which the West 'othered' the Middle East in the recent past by highlighting the differences between the two realms at the expense of similarities. The two underscored differences were the religion of Islam, one that Said discusses in depth, and veiling, which mostly women scholars studying the Middle East have introduced since then. It is therefore no accident that the two Orientalist tropes around which the 'othered' women of the Middle East have been interpreted in the recent past comprise the religion of Islam and the practice of seclusion in general and veiling in particular. Volume I attempts to move beyond this Orientalized depiction of women of the Middle East by deconstructing, first, in Part 1, the general framework through contextualization across time and space and, in Part 2, the specific tropes of religion and veiling through complicating the local knowledges on these practices.

Part 1 commences specifically with Sondra Hale's commentary on Edward Said's work from the vantage point of gender, where she refers to him as the 'accidental feminist'. Hale underscores the manner in which Said's work enabled scholars 'to address the fact that not only were Middle Eastern women totalized, with no religious, regional, ethnic/national or class differences taken into account, but they were also treated as if they are encapsulated in defined and bounded groups and categories' (Chapter 1, p. 25). Lila Abu-Lughod employs the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Orientalism* to assess more precisely what Said's particular impact was on Middle East gender and women's studies (Chapter 2). Approaching knowledge construction critically in relation not only to the 'Orient', but also to gender and sexuality, she argues, is the main positive impact. So is the development of local historical and ethnographic work, she then adds. In spite of these two incisive analyses, there are two caveats that scholars still do not agree on. One concerns the origins of feminism, that is, whether it originated in the West and then diffused to the rest of the world, including the Middle East, or was locally generated. And the other questions the disjuncture between cultural representation that Said privileged and social action where the latter often gets short-changed to the detriment of women's experiences.

The following five articles in Part 1, by Judith Tucker, Aziza Khazzoom, Soraya Altorki, Nadje Al-Ali and Sophia Pandya all move beyond the confines

deconstruct the totalizing tropes of religion and Islam, those in Part 2.2 focus instead on the limiting tropes of the harem and veiling.

Part 2.1 commences with Lila Abu-Lughod's article where she rhetorically poses the now famous question: 'Do Muslim women really need saving?' (Chapter 8) She critically analyses the way in which the neat, totalizing cultural icon of the 'Muslim woman' reified culture and justified the American intervention in Afghanistan by arguing that the intention was to save the 'oppressed' Muslim woman. Abu-Lughod argues that the United States should instead concentrate on working with local women, all the while considering and acting upon its larger responsibilities to identify and alleviate, not escalate, global injustice. Miriam Cooke takes this criticism a step further and develops the concept of the 'Muslimwoman' (Chapter 9). This concept captures how neo-Orientalist discourse has collapsed the two 'others' of religion and gender into one, in a way that 'totally overlays national, ethnic, cultural, historical and even philosophical diversity' (p. 148). And the inherent aim of this discourse in doing so, Cooke argues, is to control and manage Muslim women throughout the world (Chapter 10, p. 157).

Still another way through which one can destabilize the trope of the Muslim woman is to study women of the region before the advent of Islam. Eleanor Doumato approaches the impact of the emergence of Islam on women through the relevant Christian 'literary, hagiographic, historical, legal and patristic' materials dating from before and after the seventh century (Chapter 11, pp. 161–62). It appears that for women, veiling, seclusion, sex-segregation, right to inherit and own property, and the cultural ideology of women's inferiority all existed before the advent of Islam. She further adds that 'precedents for the patrilineal Islamic family and patriarchal Islamic marriage, granting favor to men over women in divorce and child custody, existed in pre-Islamic Christian society' (p. 176). And the trope of the Muslim woman is further deconstructed if one also analyses the variation in the treatment of women within Islam, especially in Islamic mysticism, as Arezou Azad does (Chapter 12). She studies female mystics in medieval Islam, yet instead of focusing on the archetypal Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya (d. 185/801), Azad concentrates on her lesser known contemporary Umm 'Ali of Balkh to argue that pedigree and practice of strategic marriages enabled women mystics to be especially dominant during the first century of Islam. Marion Katz moves the analysis to the present to capture women's activities beyond the realm of orthodox Islam through engagement in such practices as shrine visitation, spirit-possession rituals and Shi'i women's ceremonies (Chapter 13). She specifically concentrates on women's celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (*mawlid*) in Sanaa, Yemen, to depict the variation and complexity of women's experiences in the region. In summary, then, the articles in Part 2.1 capture the diversity of women's experiences in relation to religion across time and space, thereby trespassing the confines of the Orientalist portrayal of women as submissive and disempowered in religion in general, and by Islam in particular.

The two leading articles of Part 2.2 challenging the Orientalist tropes of the harem are by Leila Ahmed and Nadia El Cheikh. Ahmed directly takes on Western

ethnocentrism that stereotypes, objectifies and politicizes women of the Middle East (Chapter 14). Even though the harem refers to the private living quarters and arrangements of women of a particular household or family, Ahmed maintains, Western interests home in specifically and exclusively on the sexual relations embedded within. Such subversion disguises and conceals sources of women's strength and agency, especially the freedoms women practise in these spaces. Nadia El Cheikh then takes the conception of the harem into the past, into tenth century Baghdad to 'properly historicize' it (Chapter 15, p. 246). She employs contemporaneous anthologies to discuss the harem of Caliph al-Muqtadir (908–932) as well as the household harems of the non-elite. Moving beyond the mystifying Orientalist conceptions of inaccessibility, sex and idleness, El Cheikh defines the harem simply as part of a residence where women and children conducted their daily lives. The Abbasid harem was, for instance, 'the site of a web of female relationships structured by its own hierarchies', where, rather than idling about, the women engaged not only in economic and philanthropic activities, but also palace politics (p. 252).

The next five articles address and deconstruct the Orientalist trope of veiling by contextualizing women's head covering across time and space. Haleh Afshar specifically notes the manner in which the current climate of Islamophobia predicated on Orientalism burdens women living in the West who cover; these women are depicted as 'being oppressed, perhaps exotic and possibly dangerous' (Chapter 16, p. 261). She instead argues that veiling should be approached as an individually exercised freedom of choice, a form of modesty that should be respected and supported by all. Minoo Derayeh moves into the past, taking the practice of veiling up in Iranian history, revealing how it had always been 'connected to women's identity, sexuality, chastity, liberation, education and progress' (Chapter 17, p. 277). Iranian women turn into indecent and disobedient actors warranting control and oppression with the intervention of culture and politics. Neither the Iranian state's intervention first in 1936 to unveil women nor in 1979 to veil them, Derayeh contends, respected women's right to choose – both effectively silenced women, albeit in different ways. She therefore points out that is not the act of veiling, but rather the political power enforcing it that oppresses women.

The contemporary impact of neo-liberal capitalism on veiling is analysed in the context of Turkey by Banu Gökarksel and Anne Secor (Chapter 18). The veiling fashion in Turkey, they argue, is rife with moral ambivalence: its religious practice of modesty is in tension with its social significance in terms of fashion, aesthetics, politics or class status. Women consumers in Turkey resolve this tension by arguing that what they exercise is 'the self-management of desires aroused by consumption and its display' (p. 295). Rebecca Gould further articulates the manner in which veiling reinforces capitalism in the context of Iran (Chapter 19). By incorporating the state-mandated veil into the capitalist world system, the state successfully suppresses women's agency. Yet this is not any different from what happens to women in the rest of the world. Gould states that 'the only major difference between capitalist commodification and compulsory veiling is that in the

first instance, women are interpellated into the patriarchal regime through male desire while in the second instance they are interpellated through male authority' (p. 326). Taking this survey of multiplicity of meanings of the veil across time and space in the Middle East and its Diasporas a step further, the section concludes with the modern orthodox Jewish women's head covering examined by Valeria Seigelshter and Tova Hartman (Chapter 20). Their interviews with practising women reveal a multivalent and nuanced experience that combines orthodox Jewish women's search for self-expression as individuals with their commitment to religious tradition and its practices. In all, then, these articles help deconstruct the tropes of the harem and veiling by revealing the complexity behind these practices, which acquire meaning through the intersection of local context with personal agency.

In summary then, Volume I deconstructs the stereotyped depiction of women of the Middle East by bringing in the works of scholars written in the last three decades, works that ably contextualize the Oriental woman through time and across space. All these articles demonstrate the similarities in the accumulation of women's knowledge and experience across spatial boundaries such as the Middle East and the rest while also highlighting differences within the Middle East across time and place. Such nuanced criticism, I argue, no longer 'others' the lives of the women of the Middle East, but instead approaches and studies them in and of themselves, just like one would do with women located anywhere else in the world.

Following this introduction is a bibliography of similar additional sources I surveyed but did not have space to include in full.

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## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME II

*Fatma Müge Göçek*

After Volume I deconstructed the Orientalist conception of the silent, obedient and oppressed Muslim woman of the Middle East, Volume II takes on the next step to build a new analytical framework, one that reaches, understands and conveys the agency of the women of the Middle East on their own terms. It does so by observing and following these women and listening to them produce meaning, and by covering women's activities in numerous spaces that range from interpreting religious texts, writing plays, poetry and novels to composing and performing music. Such a wide spectrum of activities women of the Middle East engage in across time and space generates a multiplicity of meanings and knowledge based not on stereotyped tropes, but rather on their lived experiences.

Middle East women's meaning-making process is contextualized at two levels; Part 1 traces the process within society at large, especially within history, while Part 2 delves into more detail by observing particular spaces of activity, especially within contemporary society. In Part 1, all the scholars tackle the issue of sources: what historical sources are there on women of the Middle East, and how should these sources be critically evaluated to approximate women's experiences? Ahmed Ragab focuses specifically on the use of Muslim religious texts to socially locate women (Chapter 21); he criticizes the use of, especially, the Qur'an and the traditions to portray what the lives of women of the Middle East were really like, without realizing that such religious texts often depict women as they *ought* to be. Legal texts reflect somewhat better the intention of the law with lived daily experience. Analysing bibliographical dictionaries and necrologies, Ragab displays how women did not attain essential authority as men often did, but rather achieved circumstantial epistemic authority through a combination of 'the presence of qualifying reasons and corroborating empirical evidence' (p. 15). Ornaima Abou-Bakr tries to recover women's 'authorial voice' from Middle Eastern history, first from within male-authored texts, then from early modern female history writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and finally from contemporary scholars and theorists (Chapter 22). Termining this process of recovery 'rings of memory', Abou-Bakr classifies, translates, critically re-analyses past compositions not only to make Muslim women 'textually visible' in history, but also to re-affirm her own present authority as a contemporary Muslim woman scholar.

The last article, by Akram Khater, approaches women's meaning-making processes by analysing nuns in eighteenth century Damascus. Khater reveals the brief agency Christian women in Damascus attained through religious change. New

religious trends instigated by Latin missionaries and a new generation of local Catholic clerics not only viewed Christian women as 'repositories of religious honor and authenticity', but also allowed the nuns 'to construct and advance their own alternative notions of Christianity' (Chapter 23, p. 58). In all, then, Part 1 assesses the access to and generation of meaning regarding the women of the Middle East in history, critically analysing a wide spectrum of sources in relation to the information they provide.

Part 2 takes a more detailed approach, examining how women of the Middle East generate meaning in *particular* spaces themselves. Part 2.1 traces women's ideas and actions in the fine arts (further divided into music, cinema and drawing/painting/photography), Part 2.2 articulates women's activities in fiction (further subdivided into poetry and prose) and Part 2.3 pinpoints women's agency in non-fiction (further separated into the categories of interviews, memoirs and biographies/autobiographies).

In Part 2.1, Veronica Doubleday commences the process by focusing on the tradition of women playing the frame drum in the Middle East, often in conjunction with dancing, a tradition that dates back to the third millennium BCE (Chapter 24). After the rise of monotheistic religions, women continue to make music, but do so within their much more limited circles. Hence the shift away from public presence is gradual and pertinent to all area religions. Valerie Behiery shifts the focus from music to the arts; the attention is specifically on the works of three contemporary women artists originally from the Middle East, with all three intent on destabilizing Western perceptions of the veil (Chapter 25). The women artists undertake this task by differentiating the contextualized veil (revealing 'the centrality of veiling as a metaphor'), postcolonial veil (exposing and subverting 'the censoring effect of the veil's reification') and subjective veil (corroborating 'the radical implications of a Western conferral of selfhood onto the visibly marked Muslim female other') (p. 135). Hence these women artists draw attention to the whole range of meanings the veil entails, thereby criticizing, subverting and trespassing the Western tropes.

Nehad Selailha and Sarah Enany examine women playwrights in Egypt, whose presence is 'inextricably bound up with the historico-political background of the country' in general, and 'intensive cultural contact with Europe in particular' (Chapter 26, p. 140). Tracing the emergence of women playwright pioneers to the 1922–52 period, they then analyse the works of women playwrights in the socialist (1952–70), Sadatist (1970s) and current capitalist (1980s to the present) periods. Often marginalized by their male counterparts, these women began combining the activities of writing and directing in the early 1990s, in a manner that increasingly provides them with additional public space and attention. Minoo Derayeh turns on to the depiction of women in Iranian cinema in terms of two themes in two different time periods, 'from silenced and erotic to silenced and desexualized' (1960–78) to 'emancipated and liberated voices' (1989–2007), with the 1979 revolutionary period being marked by the inherent absence of women, except as proper Muslim women (Chapter 27). She highlights the manner in which the clerics of the Iranian Revolution, which was intended to publicly control women, witnessed instead the emergence of progressive women. Susan Platt turns the lens instead to contemporary art practised by women

in Turkey during the 1980–2000 period (Chapter 28). In their art, women artists of Turkey engage either political events with international resonance or domestic life and rituals. In all, then, women of the Middle East engage in a wide spectrum of creative activities in the fine arts, within and across history, with decreased public presence after the advent of monotheistic religions.

Part 2.2 moves on to cover the category of fiction, through the activities of Arab, Iranian and Turkish women writers. Michelle Hartman commences the discussion by concentrating on the ambivalent legacy of Al-Khansa', who is considered to be the first woman poet writing in Arabic (Chapter 29). She takes issue with the manner in which the translation of Al-Khansa's poem into English decontextualizes the poem from the setting in which it was created. Once stripped of additional nuances, the poems end up reinforcing a number of Arab women stereotypes. With this caution in mind, the scholars Radwa Ashour, Mohammed Berrada, Ferial Ghazoul and Amina Rachid join forces in an article periodizing women's literature in the region (Chapter 30). They elaborate on how, in their work, Arab women writers are able to draw on their rich, ancient heritage. In doing so, however, they are also impacted by contemporaneous forces, initially the region's colonization by the West, followed by the age of doubt, war and frustration since the 1970s. Hence, time, space and individual standpoint intersect, leading women of the Middle East to produce different texts and different junctures.

Kamran Talattof periodizes Iranian women's literature, analysing its transformation from the pre-revolutionary period to the present (Chapter 31). He argues, along with others discussed previously, that the 1979 Revolution was significant in producing a post-revolutionary Islamic feminism. Since Iranian women were suppressed by the Islamic forces and ignored by the left during the Revolution, they turned to address other women's problems, dedicating new periodicals to women's issues in the process. As a consequence, Iranian women were able to use their marginalization creatively, gradually turning into a significant ideological force in contemporary Iran. Sima Inşir Parker instead tracks the works of women writers from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic (Chapter 32). She does so within the framework of a 'Women Writers of Turkey' project, one that explicitly explores the literary canon to recover not only women writers, but also the lives of Turkish women. Inşir moves beyond the common practice of reducing women's experience in Turkey to ethnically Turkish women by also including Kurdish and Armenian women writers. Finally, Miriam Cooke examines the women writers of the region within the precarious space of war in general and the Iraqi occupation in particular, arguing that Iraqi women try to fight the violence with their pens (Chapter 33). Especially significant in this context, Cooke notes, is the emergence of the blogosphere, where women of the Middle East are able to publicly express their views in much larger numbers. In all, Part 2.2 once again captures the complexity of meaning production by women of the Middle East as they pen fiction across time and space.

Part 2.3 approaches women of the Middle East within the space of non-fiction as they write autobiographies, narrate life stories, fight to attend soccer games, reflect on their life chances or mourn the violence embedded in their lives. Magda Al-Nowaihi



draws attention to the fact that Arab women's autobiographical works are marked – and she further argues that they are ultimately enriched – ‘by tension, hesitation, and anxiety, particularly regarding their own power and authority as authors ... [that] enables them to express collective sorrows and dreams in this seemingly most individualistic of genres’ (Chapter 34, p. 266). For Al-Nowaihi, the fact that Arab women writers do not position themselves as all-knowing authorities enables them to turn their works into sites of resistance. As a consequence, they pen extremely socially incisive autobiographical works with the intention of generating change. Sigal Nagar-Ron and Pnina Motzafi-Haller jointly take on the issue of silence and fragmentation in women's narratives as well (Chapter 37). Yet their focus is on the experiences of first-generation Mizrahi Jewish women immigrants in Israel. They conduct interviews to eventually argue that Mizrahim women overcome their double marginalization in Israeli society – on grounds of ethnicity and gender – by adopting, resisting, appropriating and refashioning – and thereby destabilizing – hegemonic narratives.

Rosemary Sayigh turns to study the manner in which women members of a Palestinian refugee (Shatila) camp in Lebanon represent the ‘self’ in their life histories (Chapter 35). She finds out that, over time, women ‘collectivize’ their personal narratives, though they are still inflected to a certain degree by class of origin and individual aspiration. This emerging self is both subjectifying and liberating, revealing once again the contradictions within which women, in this case in Palestinian camps, need to navigate their lives and construct their life narratives. Babak Fozooni approaches contemporary Iranian women's issues through the socially contested space of football (soccer) (Chapter 36). In Iran, Fozooni argues, ‘[f]ootball has come to play a pivotal role in the process of self-organization of working women and their fight against religious and secular forms of patriarchy’ (p. 314). As such, soccer provides a symbolic platform for working-class women that moderates their access to the private and public spheres. Iranian women first struggled to attend football games; after attending, they have also fought for and won the right to play soccer themselves. Such a struggle against state-set boundaries enables Iranian working-class women to gain consciousness, engage in negotiations with the state and form a collective identity in the process. Finally, Shahla Talebi approaches the women of the Middle East from an entirely negative vantage point (Chapter 38); she analyses the suicide of a former leftist woman political prisoner in contemporary Iran to test the limits of mourning as a social category. In the process, Talebi illustrates the manner in which historically shaped political ideals interact with gendered subjectivities to make physical survival impossible. In all, then, these activities reveal that women of the Middle East generate meaning in a multiplicity of spaces in a manner similar to women elsewhere in the world. And analysing this wide spectrum of meaning reveals the variations among women of the Middle East.

These three sections together present a wide spectrum of meanings that are generated from the women's experiences on the ground up, thereby fully articulating Middle Eastern women's agency, on the one side, and further destabilizing Orientalist tropes, on the other.

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## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME III

Fatma Müge Göçek

Volume III focuses on the issues that challenge the women of the Middle East. Yet in defining these issues scholars do not focus on differences, but rather similarities with other women throughout the world. Hence, their aim – and also the aim here – is to reconstruct an analytical framework that is no longer constricted and contained by Oriental tropes. Yet even defining issues conceptually as 'economic', 'political' and 'social' has taken place in the last couple of centuries as a consequence of Western European modernity. With the spread of this modernity to the rest of the world through economic, political and social forces, existing social order was increasingly defined in accordance with science, reason and progress. This new order was predicated on individual rights and citizenship, and reproduced through education.

While many scholars praise modernity because of the opportunities it has created for the majority of the people in the world through primarily economic development, professionalization and work, others underscore the inherent political violence embedded within the exclusionary practices of nationalism, law, social movements and especially war. Women throughout the world have also been impacted by Western European modernity. Their presence in the public sphere participating in economic, political and social activities has especially been taken as a measure of their 'liberation'. In the case of women of the Middle East whose presence in the public sphere has been scant from the ancient times to the present, such a measure of modernity is bound to, and does indeed, present a gloomy picture. It is imperative to move beyond such value judgements to focus on the experiences of Middle Eastern women on the ground in a variety of contexts, contexts that are defined by the women themselves rather than the theoretical parameters of the economic, the political and the social. In that vein, I present the issues challenging women of the Middle East in three parts, the economic, the political and the social, with subsections defined by the activities the local women engage in in each field.

Part I focuses on the economic challenges; these challenges are subdivided into the sections that are most prominent in the lives of Middle Eastern women, namely work, development and consumption. Hence, women's participation in the economy is negotiated through their drawing of the boundaries of what comprises work, assessing their contribution to economic development and, finally, evaluating their activities in the neo-liberal capitalist world order as consumers.

In Part 1.1, on work, Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud discusses Palestinian working women in Israel (Chapter 39). Palestinian Arab women who are citizens of Israel are among the lowest paid in the world, like other Arab women; this is in sharp contrast, however, with the paid labour participation of Jewish women in Israel, which is instead among the highest globally. Daoud argues that this marginalization 'is a direct consequence of Israeli state policies that hinder Palestinian women's access to the paid labor force, while the massive confiscation of their land removes the possibility of continuing their traditional agricultural work' (pp. 19–20). In addition, tradition, patriarchy and socialization, on the one side, and levels of education and social status, on the other also, emerge as contributing factors to their marginalization in the labour force. F. Umut Beşpınar analyses women's agency in relation to work in Turkey (Chapter 40). She argues that class continues to be the main determining factor because structural factors impact women from different classes differently: working-class women's self-esteem and self-respect increase when they meet their work-related goals. Middle- and upper-middle-class women, however, do not have a similar experience because they are much more concerned about maintaining their social class position. These two articles cogently display some of the many factors that impact women's participation in the workplace throughout the region.

In Part 1.2, on development, Lila Abu-Lughod critically analyses the 2005 Arab Human Development Report prepared for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) by local organizations in the Middle East (Chapter 41). She raises three objections to the report. First, it lends itself to being appropriated negatively to evince the pathology and backwardness of Arab gender culture. Second, it perceives education as the panacea to overcome all economic adversity, confusing literacy with creativity and knowledge. Such emphasis on formal education not only promotes the norms and values of educated urban middle-class women, but devalues the activities of those who do not fit these criteria. And third, its reliance on 'a particular international language of women's rights and the dominant political paradigms this dialectic indexes [such as] modernization, human development or (neo)liberalism' colours how it portrays modern Arab societies and history (p. 59). When framed as such, Abu-Lughod argues, all evaluations of women of the Middle East are bound to fall short because the expectations are set by an inherently Western-centric model. This top-down assessment of development by the UNDP is countered by Rokhsana Bahramitash, who studies low-income Islamic women by focusing on their local relations (Chapter 42). She introduces the term 'solidarity economy' to capture how women in the community network with each other continually to provide poor relief. Future studies on women and development in the Middle East need to conduct studies similar to the latter article in order to capture not what the West asserts the Middle Eastern women to be, but rather what the local women decide they actually are.

In Part 1.3, consumption emerges as a significant space of economic activity for women of the Middle East, probably due to the world diffusion of neo-liberal capitalism after the end of the Cold War. Mona Russell takes a historical approach

to the relationship of women and consumption in the context of Egypt, thereby capturing the impact on women of the introduction of capitalist market forces to the Middle East from the late nineteenth century on (Chapter 43). In the newspaper advertisements, the 'Modern Egyptian Girl' was initially depicted as white and Europeanized. Yet the male elite had contradictory desires: they wanted to appear civilized in front of the world by letting women appear in public, but also wanted to marginalize them. Advertising provided the perfect opportunity to solve this contradiction: women were only allowed to become increasingly visible in the public sphere as consumers, not as equal citizens. The narrative is similar in Noor Al-Qasimi's study of *abaya* (body veil) as fashion in the United Arab Emirates, in that rather than liberating women, it traps them (Chapter 44). Hence, while *abaya*-as-fashion does indeed destabilize the traditional, religious form of women's clothing, it is solely a form of passive resistance in that does not offer an alternative. In all, then, consumption is unable to generate a new space for women, one within which they can challenge the confines of their present location.

Part 2 attends to the political challenges facing the women of the Middle East, and it is subdivided into the two spheres of activities women engage in, namely negotiating the politically hegemonic forces, on the one side, and instigating political change through revolutions, on the other. Part 2.1, on the constraining hegemonic impact of state/citizenship, nation/nationalism, and law/rights, commences with a study by Mounira Charrad, who studies the role the state plays in women's lives through gender legislation (Chapter 45). The state's promotion of gender legislation destabilizes kinship-based solidarities, replacing them with individual-based rights. Such a transition often debilitates women's public position because they become totally reliant on the legal system backed by the state, instead of on kin-based networks and support. Amélie Le Renard analyses the impact of the state on women in another context, in Saudi Arabia (Chapter 46). The Saudi state has, she argued, created strictly segregated public spaces for women, with the intention of strengthening the category of 'Saudi' women. Yet Saudi women have successfully appropriated this space, making it their own, but unfortunately not with enough agency to transform it. Faedah Totah instead focuses on those instances when the state actively allows women to participate in the public sphere, as in the case of political commemorations in Syria (Chapter 47). Once again, however, the Syrian state and government only allow such public visibility and political activity by women if they do not challenge the local sociopolitical order, but instead reinforce it. In all, then, even though women of the Middle East do seem to participate in the state-controlled public sphere, they are unable to transform it.

If there is so much public containment of women by the political order, is change ever possible? Part 2.2, on the revolutionary, instead concentrates on sources of social change, once again subdivided into the categories of revolution, war/peace negotiations and violence. Lina Khatib commences the analysis by studying women's public participation in Lebanon in the aftermath of the Civil War (Chapter 48). The war reinforced the patriarchal subjugation, economic deprivation and marginalization of

women. Its only positive impact was the increased participation of women in the workplace. Yet since they did so not out of choice, but rather out of necessity, the negative impact of patriarchy sustained itself, thereby hindering social change.

Janine Astrid Clark and Jillian Schwedler survey women's activism in Islamist parties in Jordan and Yemen (Chapter 49). They state that women's participation in the highly conservative parties have increased dramatically due to 'the structure of intraparty fissures over both ideological and strategic issues' which were not related to the subject of women (p. 243). Even though women are now members of the parties' consultative councils, which are the highest elected bodies, they still do not have an influential role promoting change. Homa Hoodfar and Fatemeh Sadeghi study the one significant country where a politically strong Islamist women's movement has emerged to promote change: Iran (Chapter 50). Especially from 1997 to 2005, the contradictions between the regime's gender ideology and the laws it attempted to impose on women led to extremely lively public debates. In June 2005, diverse groups of Iranian women joined forces to launch their first collective action. Even though their action was gradually suppressed, the multitude of groups and activists still continue to tackle issues, especially with the intention of reclaiming the public space for women. Nadje Al-Ali analyses another case where such mobilization by women did not result in positive change (Chapter 51). Focusing on women's political location in counter-revolutionary Egypt, which was controlled by the military, Al-Ali states that she is at a loss to identify 'what, in the current Egyptian context, an adequate transnational feminist strategy and position looks like' (p. 261). So all she can recommend is to support the existence of a third intellectual and political space that provides solutions that are not dichotomous or polarized. In all these cases, then, the existing political order continuously attempts to contain the women of the Middle East and often succeeds, with the possible exception of the Islamist women's movement in Iran.

Part 3 focuses on the social challenges to women of the Middle East, subcategorized into the three sections of health, life course and education. In Part 3.1, on health, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet approaches women's health issues in Iran historically (Chapter 52). Male political leaders first became interested in women's health, she argues, due to nationalism – they had to control the sexuality of women and men in the name of the nation. Likewise, they had to regulate, supervise and discipline women on the principles of mothering and childrearing. Kashani-Sabet argues that the combination of the maternalist discourse and the hygiene movement ironically ended up creating new public spaces for women where they could discuss sexuality, marital life and women's rights in the family. In terms of health, another Orientalist trope that needs to be challenged is female genital cutting, which is only practised in 20 per cent of the Islamic world, mostly in parts of Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia as a cleansing ritual. Yet its coverage, especially in the Western world, makes it appear as if it were very prominent throughout the Middle East. Kathryn Yount ably studies this practice, documenting how it actually predated the arrival of Christianity and Islam (Chapter 53). She also reveals the variation in the practice by religion and education; educated Christian women

discontinue the practice at a higher rate than the rest. This differential, Yount conjectures, may be emerging due to current Islamic ideologies that attempt to preserve 'customary' practices.

In Part 3.2, on the life course, Max Weiss studies the location of women in the emergence of the Lebanese Shi'a as an ethno-religious social group (Chapter 54). Women's participation in Shi'a mourning rituals, for instance, has changed over time. During the 1920s and 1930s, as gender became a legible category that constructed social relations due to increased modernity in the region, Weiss argues, women were able to assume a more active role in the public sphere. Given that women continuously face more adversity, what practices do they engage in in their everyday lives to alleviate such a disadvantage? Homa Hoodfar studies the manner in which low-income Egyptian women employ wedding dowry and marriage contracts and negotiations to circumvent limitations imposed by the legal system and traditional ideology (Chapter 55). By doing so, these women promote their own economic interests while also bypassing the legal limitations placed upon them.

In Part 3.3, on education, it becomes evident that women have been, and still are, more active in religious education, something that is often overlooked at the expense of secular education. Asma Sayeed discusses Muslim women's religious education in early and classical Islam, especially in terms of the Sunni legal discourse regarding the permissibility of educating women (Chapter 56). She states that while the Quran is gender neutral on education and therefore open to women, the *hadith*, the sayings of the prophet, are more ambivalent. Combining the parameters of religious law with historical practice, she studies the career of one twelfth-century Muslim woman scholar, Shuhda al-Katiba, to reveal that the *hadith* and local practices were not able to prevent her education back then. Moving from the past to the present, Daniel Kirk and Diane Napier instead analyse 'gender equality' in secular education in the United Arab Emirates (Chapter 57). They state that access is certainly not equally distributed by gender, as women often have a hard time negotiating the tense relations between traditional female roles and the 'new' (read 'secular') ones advocating more public participation by women.

In all, then, the adverse impact of patriarchy runs through the economic, political and social challenges. Even though women of the Middle East try their hardest to transform their location in each sphere, their attempts still fall short. That is why Volume IV will discuss the possible solutions to these challenges in the future.

Following this introduction is a bibliography of similar sources that were not included in the text.

# INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME IV

*Fatma Müge Göçek*

Volume IV turns from issues challenging women of the Middle East to possible solutions, in two parts, that would change women's location in society for the better. Part 1 discusses the solutions offered by the prominent scholars in the field, while Part 2 identifies trends in recent literature that signal solutions.

Part 1 commences with assessments of the field by seven prominent scholars, namely Valentine Moghadam, Elizabeth Fernea, Frances Hasso, Marcia Inhorn, Lila Abu-Lughod and Rabab El-Mahdi, and Aseel Sawalha. The introductory article by Moghadam assesses the manner in which Middle East scholars have contributed to the broader field of gender and women's studies (Chapter 58). She specifically argues that most noteworthy contributions have taken place around the conceptual issues of how the institutions of the state, community and the family intersect to generate complex outcomes. As such, possible solutions would emerge, Moghadam contends, by specifically analysing the intersection, on the one side, of the state and family through law, and of the state and community through violence, on the other. Fernea shifts the focus from structural elements impacting Middle Eastern women's lives to interpretive ones, especially to the social practices in the workplace, home, courts, political arena and the religious sphere (Chapter 59). Arguing that all such practices inherently challenge existing relations and therefore contain the potential for change, Fernea predicts that possible solutions would be generated by the future male and female leaders 'who dare to take on the formidable problems of the area – poverty, unemployment, corruption in high places, unequal access to education and health care' (p. 27).

Hasso's approach engages the more recent, cutting-edge postcolonial analysis (Chapter 60); she does this by ably and critically situating knowledge about the field with her personal experience as a student, teacher and researcher. Solutions, Hasso argues, similar to the stand taken in this volume, go beyond binary frameworks such as those between 'the West/East, authentic/inauthentic, modern/traditional, resistance/abjection and secular/pious', and beyond the limitations of 'reductive, ahistorical, static and decontextualized engagements with "culture" and "religion"' (p. 31). She instead proposes to analyse gendered selves, subjectivities and identities from the ground up, with the intention of eventually developing comparative feminist analyses that traverse all the boundaries confining women and thereby hindering the generation of solutions. Inhorn likewise underscores the significance of gender ethnography in generating knowledge on

women of the Middle East locally, based on their particular experiences (Chapter 61). She specifically identifies the still understudied areas of anthropology – her speciality – that would enable the articulation of issues on the ground, thereby signalling possible solutions. These are: war and refugeeism; masculinity studies, including marital ethnography; sexuality studies, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies; science and technology studies; and anthropologies of the environment, law, education, linguistics and art.

Perhaps how much the field of studies on women of the Middle East has developed – and yet still has a long way to go – is best captured by the conversation between Abu-Lughod and El-Mahdi over the ‘woman question’ in the recent Egyptian revolution (Chapter 62). The two scholars ably deconstruct the manner in which the women’s role in the revolution quickly turned, after the revolution, into an analysis of their rights and status. They agree that such a shift selectively picks certain activities while totally ignoring others, all the while assuming, first, that women were dormant and passive to start with; second, that women are a homogenous group; and, third, that women’s lives can be reduced to their rights alone. Instead, Abu-Lughod and El-Mahdi expand the spatial and temporal boundaries of ‘the woman question’ by bringing in their decade-long mobilization throughout Egypt. The significance of the concept of boundaries is analysed further by Sawalha, who proposes the concept of ‘gendered space’ as a way to conceptually reach Middle Eastern women’s experience and thereby generate knowledge that traverses the limitations of Orientalist binarisms (Chapter 63). Such an approach, she argues, offers a promising starting point for thinking about women’s surge into contemporary public national activism, about the reactionary response of violence and repression against them by official security forces and self-appointed gender police, and about the subsequent outcry by women and men against gender repression’ (p. 79). In all, then, in Part 1 scholars convey the manner in which studies on the women of the Middle East have moved beyond the Orientalist framework. They identify both the challenges and the possible solutions through situating their analyses on local women’s knowledge and experience across time and space, and also creating novel concepts such as gendered space.

Part 2 delves into the literature and identifies four sites that not only outline future areas of study, but may also contain possible solutions in doing so. These constitute the four sections of feminisms, sexualities, diasporas and technologies. Part 2.1 discusses feminisms, specifically the existing tension between secular and state feminisms, on the one side, and the possibilities presented by Islamic and Kurdish feminisms, on the other. The first two articles, by Nawar Al-Hassan Golley and Naomi Weiner-Levy, problematize the concepts of patriarchy and feminism by locally analysing the relations of women of the Middle East. Al-Hassan Golley challenges Euro-centric depictions of Middle East women that strip local women of their agency in generating local feminist movements on their own by arguing that ‘if considered in the context of the class conflict and social changes at the time, Arab feminism can be seen as indigenous’ (Chapter 64, p. 92). It was born out of an internal struggle against the old religious, social and economic

order, she contends, alongside the external struggle against European colonization. Weiner-Levy approaches patriarchy and feminism relationally in terms of the interaction of fathers and daughters, specifically focusing on the life stories of trailblazing Druze women (Chapter 65). She finds out that instead of the expected patriarchal stand of ‘control, repression, demand for obedience, and maintenance of the inferior status of women’, these Druze fathers displayed ‘gentleness, dedication, support and encouragement of change in female gender roles’ (p. 101).

Riham Bahi and Fatima Seedat tackle the issue of secular and Islamic feminisms in the Middle East, with Bahi specifically focusing on the frameworks offered by the secular modernist and Islamic reformist approaches (Chapter 66). What is especially exciting, she contends, is the reinterpretation of religious sources by women; women religious scholars employ ‘*ijtihad*’ (independent investigation of the religious sources) and *tafsir*’ (interpretation of the Qur’an) as their basic methodology in order to establish a new gender-sensitive hermeneutics’ that renders ‘gender equality possible’ (p. 134). Such successful challenge of the existing patriarchal discourse on its own terms generates new public spaces for women. Seedat further problematizes the concept of Islamic feminism, however, arguing for the continuous maintenance of a ‘third’ critical space between Islam and feminism (Chapter 67). She does so because she argues that Islamic feminism ‘precludes new understandings of sex difference originating in non-Western and anticolonial cultural paradigms’ (p. 146).

Interestingly enough, I think the Kurdish women’s movement is able to address the tension between the local and transnational forces acting upon feminism most successfully. Analysing the contents of three Kurdish feminist journals printed in Turkey, Ömer Çaha finds similarities with non-white Western women’s movements like the black women’s movement (due to the oppression of the Kurdish women by their Turkish counterparts), on the one side, and an ethnic-based feminist women’s movement (due to the oppression of their Kurdish male counterparts in the ethnic struggle), on the other (Chapter 68). Hence, the Kurdish women’s movement simultaneously destabilizes the essentialist understanding of women and the holistic understanding of ethnic struggle. Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt cross the border to analyse Kurdish women activists in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah in Iraq to articulate the tension between nationalism and women’s rights (Chapter 69). All too often, Kurdish rights pre-empt women’s rights because of the disjuncture between the Kurdish nation and the state, a disjuncture women cannot yet fully utilize to their advantage. Still, the publicly visible location of Kurdish women activists and fighters in a community that has for decades engaged in conflict resulting in the attrition of men promises a new formulation where Kurdish women have the closest chance of becoming publicly equal to Kurdish men. In all, then, the religious interpretive space of Islamic feminism and the ethnic relational space of Kurdish feminism offer the most exciting novel spaces for women’s movements in the Middle East.

Part 2.2 focuses on sexualities in general and the negotiation of their boundaries in the context of the women of the Middle East in particular. Approaching

sexualities in this manner as a spectrum rather than a static binary destabilizes existing heteronormative practices in the Middle East, practices that have severely limited the human potential, especially in terms of creativity. Entirely new social spaces emerge in their stead, spaces that can be comparatively studied throughout the world. Leslie Peirce's thorough analysis of writing histories of sexualities in the Middle East reveals an escalation in scholarly publications on the topic since the early 1990s (Chapter 70). In terms of primary sources, however, while sexuality in terms of 'representations of love and desire, sexual etiquette, the biology of sex, the boundaries of licit sex and so on' was there in amplitude, it mostly referred to Muslim, urban and orthodox cultures at the expense of the non-Muslim minority, rural and heterodox (p. 198). In addition, coverage of the topic declined after the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the advent of modernity. Peirce also notes a tension and a silence in the coverage of female sexuality: fear of women's sexual desire has been in tension with the positive recognition of women's sexuality in marriage, and homoerotic relations among women are often silent. Building on the coverage of sexuality in Islamic sources, Pinar İkkaracan argues in addition that 'the sexual oppression of women in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Muslim world is not the result of an oppressive vision of sexuality based on Islam, but a combination of historical, sociopolitical and economic factors' (Chapter 71, p. 226).

Afsaneh Najmabadi and Momin Rahman undertake empirical research to analyse the negotiation of sexuality in the contemporary Middle East. Najmabadi puzzles over how and why political, legal and religious leaders have debated the advisability or permissibility of sex change in Iran (Chapter 72). After addressing the complexity of studying sexuality, she argues that it is the specific genealogy of *jins/sex/genus* in Islam that has enabled a variation of legal, social and biological interpretations that have in turn created ambiguous spaces where such discussions of sex change can take place. Rahman instead focuses on the lives of gay Muslims since their mere existence 'challenges the positioning of western and eastern cultures as mutually exclusive and oppositional' (Chapter 73, p. 256). Their intersectional social location leads them to suffer oppression, but at the same time destabilizes identity categories and creates a new analytical space with possible liberating potential. In summary, then, sexualities are significant in generating solutions because they trespass binaries to create new analytical spaces with the potential for increased justice and inequality for all.

Parts 2.3 and 2.4 move on to new possibilities that have emerged with the advent of globalization in the areas of diasporas and technologies. Part 2.3 analyses diasporas of women of the Middle East throughout the world, demonstrating that the boundaries defining women of the Middle East are no longer spatially contiguous, but instead global. The articles survey the location of covered women originating in the Middle East in the United States and Europe, Germany, Canada and Australia. Faegheh Shirazi and Smeeta Mishra compare young Muslim women wearing the face veil (*niqab*) in Europe and the United States (Chapter 74). Interestingly, while those in Europe view wearing the face veil as a form of rebellion and/or a form of

personal/political/religious identity, those in the United States – even though half of those interviewed wore a headscarf (*hijab*) – state they would like to have the option of wearing the face veil, but are not at all interested in actually doing so. The scholars attribute Muslim women's different views to historical, political and social factors in general, and factors such as the country's 'colonial/national history, the nature of its immigration regime, the demographic composition of immigrant groups, and how the nation operationalizes concepts such as secularism and citizenship' in particular (p. 273).

Maria Stehle turns the lens on the majority group by analysing how, in the German imaginary, Muslim women 'mainly appear in two spaces: in the public, where they are veiled and hidden from the public gaze, and in the family space, where they are oppressed within a patriarchal family structure' (Chapter 75, p. 293). Even in the case of television shows on Muslims and a Muslim hip hop artist, the veiled women continue to exist 'in, of, and outside of' Europe as they are included in new spaces on the one side but have to declare their allegiances on the other (p. 305). Zahra Hojati studies Iranian women in Canada to depict similar patterns of discrimination (Chapter 76). While Iranian women come from a gender-segregated society with hopes of full integration, it appears that, especially in the post 9/11 era, ignorance and exclusion in Canada sustain Iranian women's separation from Canadian society. The same exclusionary patterns also exist in Australia, as Christina Ho demonstrates, in the form of anti-Muslim racism (Chapter 77). This racism is 'articulated in a paternalistic nationalism that seeks to protect women, whether they are Muslim women "forced" to wear the veil or non-Muslim women as victims of sexual assault by Muslim men' (p. 335). In all, then, women of the Middle East living in Western diasporas have to constantly negotiate the exclusionary practices of host countries, practices they justify on the basis of gender difference.

Part 2.4 underscores another development that also destabilizes the time-space divide that has for so long confined the boundaries of meaning and knowledge production for women of the Middle East: emergence of new technologies, and especially virtual communication. Such technologies are especially significant for creating new spaces that aid young generations of women in achieving justice and equality on their own terms. Ahmed Al-Rawi investigates over 220,000 Facebook posts during the Arab Spring to highlight women's online activism, which was nevertheless quickly countered and resisted by Islamist men, who equated such a women's movement with an attack on Islam (Chapter 78). Hande Eslen-Ziya instead tracks Turkish women's strategically informed activism over time (Chapter 79). While women's groups employed the momentum of the Europeanization process to achieve legislative changes in the first decade of the 2000s, they switched tactics in the second decade of the 2000s with the waning of the Europeanization process; they instead started using social media and social networking groups to promote their causes.

Nabil Echchaibi specifically focuses on the blog *Muslimah Media Watch* to analyse women activists' use of blogging to influence the process of social change

in Islam (Chapter 80). Yet, Echchaibi emphasizes, such interventions are merely 'small, but consistent flows of dissent' rather than 'revolutionary subversion of hegemonic discourse on gender in Islam' (p. 371). Courtney Radsch and Sahar Khamis disagree, stating that cyberactivism provides especially young women with the opportunity to have their voice heard by the rest of the world (Chapter 81). Yet not all women of the Middle East can attract the same degree of attention in this new virtual space. Katty Alhayek reviews the work of Syrian refugee women activists to demonstrate that both the online campaign and the Western media continue to marginalize Syrian women because, she argues, the Syrian women activists do not fit the dominant Orientalist representations of Muslim women (Chapter 82). In all, then, technologies of virtual communication do open new spaces for women, but it is still too soon to determine the impact of women's use of these spaces.

In summary, all these possible solutions will (hopefully) destabilize the patriarchal control that undergirds all relations of women of the Middle East as it does elsewhere in the world. Through such destabilization, I hope, women of the Middle East will eventually be able to join forces, on their own terms, with women throughout the globe, to finally achieve justice and equality.

Following this introduction is a bibliography of similar sources I surveyed but did not have space to include in full.

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### Part 2: A new possible framework of solutions

#### Part 2.1: Feminisms

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