

Introduction

On Violence, Gender, and Global Connections

To embark on a project of discussing gender and violence in today's world means to summon a great number of hard-to-resolve questions. Current dialogues on gender and violence surface a number of problematic issues across a variety of contexts, the most significant of which are related to, on the one hand, the struggle of scholars in women's and gender studies to theorize femininity in a manner that can address the particularities of an individual's experience as well as women's experiences across global economic divides, and, on the other hand, the gay rights activists' challenge to the framing of sexual rights as purely antithetical, and therefore readable only in the context of heteronormative ideologies. Despite such methodological differences, all contemporary approaches to the relationship between gender and violence are grounded in awareness that the regulation, surveillance, and assumed performance of gender is informed by conventional views of "masculinity" and "femininity" and, further, that those views are premised on historic assumptions of how the gendered production of "male" and "female" bodies have been constructed through the phenomenon of violence. This designation of societal significations to human experiences and activities as "female" and "male" is associated with various forms of violence that constitute a range of physical, psychological, representational, discursive and situational violations of human and, particularly, women rights. Violence against women, the focus of the collection of essays *Violence and Gender in the Globalized World: The Intimate and the Extimate*, is a consequence of the workings of gender difference in patriarchal contexts—a societal dynamic that requires the consistent privileging of masculinity over femininity in an assumed heteronormative framework. Because that privileging is essential to the stability of patriarchy, it is reinforced in the moral frameworks and social processes of all cultural expressions in patriarchal societies to the point of violence. Patriarchal processes understood in this manner are so much part of our global reality that they have mitigated our ability to discern and read this "violence"; consequently, violence against women is often perceived as normative, and even necessary, in the everyday lives of both men and women in international cultural contexts.

Thus the issue of gender and violence encompasses an extraordinarily broad and culturally inflected terrain of political, physical, psychological and cultural acts and actions that delimit—particularly—women's activity and mobility, and threaten their security. In hosting contributions by eminent scholars and activists from around the world, including Germany, India, Malaysia, Palestine, South Africa, the United States, and other countries, this volume purports to account for at least a portion of the global variability of women's experiences of violence; to redefine the critical

picture of the subject of gender and violence in the age of globalization by bringing visibility both to uncommonly discussed geo-political sites and the experiences of violence that, for various reasons, have gained little attention; and to emphasize a resonance between women's experiences of violence in the so-called developed and developing contexts by drawing attention to both. As our contributors reiterate in their chapters, the cultural and performative diversity of the acts of gender violence can hardly be subsumed under a single definition or even relegated to a certain epoch or a symbolic moment in time. The discussion of violence in general, and gender violence in particular, is inextricable from a consideration of social sanctions, naturalizations, taboos, customs, and traditions that are as much universal as they are unique for each society. Furthermore, these experiences and behaviors have complex temporality: global peoples also carry with themselves the indices of past and present violence—memories and experiences that render them hybrid expressors of passivity or agency in their own cultural contexts and communities. These experiences and their interpretations have influenced women's positions as recipients, conveyors, and/or perpetrators of gender violence at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In this way, past and present violence historicizes and politicizes female bodies, and acts diversely as a reifying source or a reconstitutive resource of women's various actions, a topic which demands continuous scholarly and activist attention.

It is this ongoing, organic process of focusing on, and the discernment, constitution, and reconstitution of historic, present, and future potential registers of womanhood globally that we identify as a "feminist" approach to the subject of gender and violence in this collection. Hence, to discuss the conceptual hyphen of gender *and* violence in a feminist project appears to the editors to be a task simultaneously more urgent and more complex than that of addressing exclusively the manifestations of the narrowly conceived "gender violence"—for the latter approach all too easily identifies and petrifies the victims and perpetrators, alienating both groups from the context of their activity and reducing the complexity of the phenomenon under discussion. In this light, the present collection interprets the dialectics between gender and violence through distinctions in gender violence, as they are influenced by the identity politics circumscribing each culture at a given moment in time. At the same time, our contributors particularly attend to the comparative contexts of political, economic, and cultural violence that have influenced not only women's well-being, but also the general experience and social production of gender internationally. This global comparative method demands an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach to understanding how patriarchal constructions of gender difference occlude the additional variables of social difference, such as race and language; only such an approach can account for the multi-textured nature of gender violence.

In this light, the core agenda of this volume is to highlight recent transformations in the interpretation of the relationship between women and violence, particularly as it informs the social production of femininity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Traditionally, femininity has been articulated through an assumed consistency in women's experiences of enduring, witnessing, and mitigating against violence throughout their entire lives—all of which have been enunciated from the cognitive position that defines women specifically as the recipients, and therefore the victims, of violence. Such a definition is supported, for example, by women's tendencies to

experience incidences of sexual violence in the situation of conflict and/or domestic violence in their own homes. Recent feminist perspectives have problematized that approach to femininity by drawing attention to how women may be also configured by and implicated in violence. Sealing Cheng's investigation into trafficking in women in South Korea, for example, critiques NGO representations of women only as victims of trafficking by drawing attention to the voices of the trafficked women themselves and their own approach to the phenomenon of trafficking (see Chapter 9). In that vein, an additional agenda of the present volume is to mitigate against conventional constructions of corporeality and social behavior as either "feminine" or "masculine" and to reveal the ways in which these definitions have limited and disrupted the potential interpretations of feminine social agency outside of patriarchal constructs. Some emergent treatises on women militants, for example, demand a more elastic definition of women's social agencies, one that may account for the complex ways in which women can be read as perpetrators of violence. The consciousness of these issues is present throughout our volume.¹ More specifically, our contributors draw attention to how women's decisions to fulfill unconventional feminine roles coalesce with their experiences of being violated within patriarchy in their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and daughters. Our consciousness of those broader implications is reflected in our inclusion of Meredith Turshen's examination of how the neocolonial politics of the Algerian civil war has informed the violent experiences of both male and female teenagers and consequently has repositioned gender dynamics in that society (see Chapter 5).

Such dialogues remind us that the complexity of women's experiences of violence is a function, not only of the plural experiences of femininity derived from the dialectics between gender and violence, but also of how each of those plural experiences takes on new guises and acquires new meanings with the rise of the global market economy, information technology, disintegration of classical warfare, and the installment of new modes of violence on the global stage.² Since the purpose of this project has been to document the current state of scholarship and activism as it responds to particular, historically shaped needs of women worldwide, this volume has taken the shape which reflects how the discourse of gender and violence has informed and is informed by the past two decades of globalization-work: global market economy and its discontents; neo-modern militarism, civil wars, international terrorism, and international interventionism; the emergence of new media and the excess of traditional media coverage; still highly unequal economical relations globally; the steady depletion of health system resources in both developed and developing countries; and, as our own experience as the editors of this volume has testified, the restrictive conditions for education and research work in many parts

1 Problematic representations of women suicide bombers are explored in V.G. Julie Rajan's *The Phenomenon of Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence* (forthcoming).

2 On the phenomenon of new militarism and the rise in collateral damage, as by-products of globalization, see Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006). On these issues as bound to free market economy, see Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (London: Heinemann, 2003).

of the globe. In particular, as the context of accelerated globalization necessitates that every examination of gender and violence starts from a re-examination of the workings of gender violence as it relates to sustainable economy and its impact on woman's well-being and the exercise of cultural, faith and custom-based rights, these topics have been visited by most contributors. One may find one such close assessment of the gender economics of globalization in Valsala Kumari K.B.'s probing of the societal and gender effects of the tools for poverty alleviation such as microcredit, in the context of Kerala, India (see Chapter 3). On the other hand, this collection also recognizes the urgency of addressing one hidden by-product of globalization: the resurgence of racism. The correlations among global and local concerns over race are thus among the primary concerns in the volume, as evidenced in Loretta Ihme's study. Her observation that current representations of the trafficking of women by media and national propaganda in the enlarged European Union resonate with historical racial prejudices against, among other societal productions, the masculinity of darker-skinned men, is relevant for the discussion of gender, race, and violence not only in Europe, but in the global arena (see Chapter 10).

Personal experiences of violence in conflict situations, theoretical postulations of what constitutes a conflict, and the consequences of conflict on societies over time has been the focus of many chapters in the collection. The heightened attention that our contributors pay to this topic testifies to its exigency. The number of civilian deaths and refugees/displaced persons rises every second, and the range of economic and infrastructural damage expands swiftly around the globe. In the view of this state of affairs, the demand for international help in conflict-mitigation and assuring the basic security for civilian population affected by "new wars" is immense. In this context, the issue of human security has been disclosed as pre-eminent in the current discussions of gender and violence, and this is the topic to which Charlotte Bunch pays substantial attention in her Preface.³ At the same time, there is a pronounced need critically to recognize the implicit or temporally prolonged effects of violent conflict, such as the reconfiguration of social structures and the undermining of the functioning of social institutions, in particular those that are supposed to ensure gender equity and social mobility. Rose Shomali Musleh's timely review of the impact that the ongoing conflict in the region has had on the lives of Palestinian women and their struggle for the improvement of gender relations in Palestinian society discloses the various levels on which the concept of "collateral damage" operates (see Chapter 4). One such "implicit" collateral damage is addressed in Svetlana Slapšak's chapter, in which the author takes us into the "post-conflict"⁴ phase of the disintegration of former Yugoslavia and suggests a connection between the abusive representation of women, especially by anti-war oriented intellectuals, and the wider political failure to take responsibility for what happened during the war (see Chapter 6).

3 For a more general discussion of these issues, see Mary Kaldor, *Human Security: Reflections on Globalization and Intervention* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

4 The editors, however, acknowledge the problematic interpretations associated with the term "post-conflict." The term assumes an immediate end to violence after the official conclusion of a conflict situation, and hence does not take into account the many new and the exaggeration of the old forms of visible and invisible violence occasioned by the conflict.

While collateral damage accumulates worldwide, generating an ever-expanding network of media coverage in which the intimate and the extimate collapse, old methodological frameworks are rendered insufficient, and then refuted, reconfigured, and, sometimes, reinvented. In compiling this collection, the editors were conscious of the necessity to address the concrete life experiences, personal narratives, and needs of women in various parts of the globe. Recognized in recent feminist scholarship, the need for research more closely linked and more sophisticatedly attuned to the unique local experiences of women—cultural, political, religious, psychological—and yet appreciative of the ways of global interconnecting and exchanges of knowledge and practice that the accelerating pace of globalization also offers today is a marker of the remarkable evolutionary potential of women’s and gender studies.⁵ An evidence for this dynamics may be found in Yifat Susskind’s piece where the voices of indigenous women in Nicaragua and Kenya reorient our knowledge on the political mobility of indigenous peoples and forge new strategies for combating violence (see Chapter 1). Such reconsiderations of what constitutes women’s experiences of violence in their own words give rise to new historiographies concerning the position of women internationally—from the local through the international levels—and create a space in which to consider future horizons of both feminist theory and women’s organizing.

These observations highlight yet another agenda of the volume: an exploration of the variables configuring the ambiguous border between feminist theory and women’s activism. In different terms, both Susskind’s chapter and Angéla Kóczé’s assessment of women’s gendering of Roma identity politics (see Chapter 11) eloquently call for contextualized re-examination of activist practices. Exemplifying the fusion of activist and academic concerns to which this collection aspires, both Susskind and Kóczé attend to some academic concepts which, in their opinion, need to be saved from slipping into irrelevance: they argue that the methodological frameworks of the conceptual models such as “intersectionality” (Susskind) or “dialogic experience” (Kóczé) should be re-introduced into the everyday activist work in the respective contexts which they discuss in order to make them relevant to the immediacy of women’s experiences of violence today. In their analysis, traditional or custom-based legal and methodological frameworks are also reconstituted in the process of devising local strategies to address the reality of feminine experience.

In a similar vein, both Drucilla Cornell’s probing of the constitutional and activist relevance of the traditional South African law *ubuntu* (see Chapter 7) and Sharon A. Bong’s discussion of the work of religious rights feminists in Malaysia (see Chapter 2) demonstrate how the methodologies and contexts traditionally denounced as “patriarchal” may hide major liberatory practices for both women and men. While

5 Various recent texts emphasize women’s voices and experiences. One such example is Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin’s *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Press, 1998), which interprets the 1947 Partition of British India through the personal accounts of women survivors of the Partition. Furthermore, for a number of important theorizations of the interplay of local and global perspectives in recent scholarship, see *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (ed.), by Carole Ruth McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

Bong argues that fusions practices, such as religious rights feminist activism, may offer the best ground-level based response to gender violence, Cornell's promotion of the seemingly patriarchal law *ubuntu*, a view she shares with some of the most prominent feminist activists in the legal spheres in South Africa, is based on the belief that this traditional law offers an important critique of the Western legislative systems. In this way, the continuity between the local/particular and the global/universal is disclosed, and its active ingredients are critically probed to allow for a broader examination of women and violence in a wide range of cultural contexts. This continuity is particularly visible in the discussions of international legislation, such as Jennifer M. Green's assessment of the litigation of international human rights violations in the USA and the European Union courts (see Chapter 8).

Thus, our volume also identifies some positive consequences of globalization: the rise of "new humanitarianism"; the work of reconciliation and reconstitution; new visions for alleviating poverty; recuperative societal work; a renewed awareness of diverse ethnic, sexual, occupational, religious and politic identity choices for women globally; the development of alternative, less-hegemonic legislative frameworks for the future; and the increased importance of one specific response to the issues of gender and violence—art. In Deborah L. Madsen's assessment of the recent Chicana writing (see Chapter 12) and Marta Fernández-Morales's study of the V-Day movement (see Chapter 13), literature, theater, and art emerge as not only an alternative to the old discourses on gender and violence and the (still) superior catalysts of healing process, but also as a new form of global connecting. The situation in which an artistic project such as the V-Day can convene hundreds of thousands of people in Africa, Asia, Europe, and America over the common aim to battle gender-related violence and initiate the awareness-raising programs in almost 700 universities globally, assures us of the continued relevance of these alternative responses at the dawn of the new millennium.

The final product of these varied discussions is a multi-layered volume that can be described as "newly feminist" in its inclusion of variegated discursive, testimonial, and activist snapshots of the status of women globally at present. Through the juxtaposition of these discourses, unforeseen global connections are forged: a "both-and" attitude is endorsed as a basis for a new ethics of activism and legislation in the case-studies dealing with such different parts of the world as South Africa (Cornell) and Malaysia (Bong); the urgent need to prevent the epistemological violence which media and NGO discourses exert on female sex workers is voiced from Germany (Ihme) and South Korea (Cheng); the call for alternative methodologies binds the consideration of indigenous peoples in Kenya and Nicaragua (Susskind) and that of the Roma (Kóczé); and so on. As a result, this book testifies to the productive multitude of approaches to gender in a world in which the shrinking of time and space has generated unprecedented modi of violence but has also offered new historical possibilities for its record and reparation. This variety of themes and interpretative systems bears witness to a new, *heterogeneous and interdisciplinary* form of global connecting that has been consolidating in recent years.⁶ It is thus not incidental

6 See, for one account, Valentine M. Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

that, for all the variety of their subjects and methodologies, all the chapters featured in *Violence and Gender in the Globalized World: The Intimate and the Extimate* emphasize one specific issue: the need for a global cooperative strategy to promote security—from local, through national, to international levels; a strategy that, even as it is expandable and, hence, widely applicable, should nevertheless be capable of adjusting to specific contexts in order to highlight the variant terrain that grounds the discourse of gender and violence at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Sanja Bahun-Radunović, London, and V.G. Julie Rajan, Philadelphia
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