Book Reviews

VIOLENCE IN THE NAME OF HONOR: THEORETICAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES

Shahrzad Mojab and Nahla Abdo, Eds.
Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Library Press, 2004

REVIEWED BY NADERA SHALHOUB KEVORKIAN

The volume of collected essays, *Violence In the Name of Honor,* advocates for feminist analyses that would enable the development of a feminist epistemology regarding the crime of femicide. In doing so, the authors construct a critical approach that is informed by an anti-racist understanding of violence in the name of "honour," which takes into account the global, local and national contexts in which femicide occurs. In thus contextualizing the crime, the editors and the authors in the volume attempt to both exceed and counteract the orientalist limitations that traditionally prevent a cogent and anti-racist analysis of femicide, even within feminist critical practices. As the essays suggest throughout, attempts to critically understand femicide often disintegrate under the pressure of an "us"/ "them" binary.

Through the collection of essays, Mojab and Abdo reveal how combating femicide on both a material and theoretical level, as well as in challenging the pervasive gender wars on women, not surprisingly, encounters serious resistance from the patriarchal powers in place. which in turn control the production and reproduction of epistemic practices that find a variety of expressions in language, law, religion, education, culture, the popular media and more. In their introductory chapter, Mojab and Abdo identify several factors that mitigate our understanding (even if to limit it) of femicide. Broadly stated, they are as follows: the androcentric nature of gender relations; legal and extra-legal inequalities that exist; the state's reluctance to educate and intervene; Western racist tendencies that identify male violence as an endemic component of the "*nature*" of the Other. As Mojab and Abdo state in their introduction, femicide, or as they name it, "violence in the name of honor," carries a "complex web of contradictions between consciousness and reality, knowledge and practice, the individual and the state, the agency and the institution, nationalism and feminism, religion and politics and culture and politics."

The book is divided into four main sections. The first section is a theoretical exploration of "honour" killing. Here Mojab's contribution looks closely at the origin of gender relations that perpetually (re)produces a regime of violence against women, and presents various ideas that may aid in preventing femicide, while she discusses both short and long term strategies for intervention. In her contributions to this section, Nicole Pope discusses the way honour killing is an instrument of patriarchal control, and compares violence against women in Western and in Islamic societies. She concludes by stressing the importance of promoting local initiatives to combat such crimes. The rest of the chapters in this section focus on specific case-studies: Nukhet Sirman looks at the Turkish case, Nahla Abdo looks at the Israeli and Asa Elden writes about Sweden. In keeping with the general intent of the volume, all three chapters require the reader to contextualize their analyses and understanding in culturally specific ways, while keeping in mind, as Abdo explains, the historical, structural and institutional levels of society to more fully understand the propagation of such crimes. Additionally, the contributors to this section ask us to look closely at the socio-economic, political, and juridical forces of the state that come into play when examining the causes and effects of gender violence. Abdo pays particular attention to the colonial legacy of gender violence, and Sirman looks at the post-colonial state. Elden's contribution pays particular attention to the voices of actual women who have been victims and survivors of gender violence.

The second section of the book reflects the unique, activist efforts by the contributors and community centres, as exemplified by the essay "Community Struggle Against Honour Killing" both in Turkey and Sweden. What struck me the most about these contributions was the constant attempt to build interventions on behalf of the women by listening to those voices, as well as using the voices themselves as acts of witnessing and a way of speaking back to the violence perpetrated against them. Despite the specificity of the contributions, on some levels these essays transcend the specific. For example, when reading about the experience of Turkish women with gender violence, I become cognizant of, and applaud the progress made by, the Turkish community organizations; but I also understand the burden we all carry as women, feminists, and citizens of the planet, when crimes are committed in the name of cultures and traditions. Nabahat Akkoc sums up the tran-

scendence of the ostensibly "culturally specific" when she writes in her conclusion "the cultural reasons for the punishment of women in one sentence; it is possible to collect hundreds of practices of different cultures under a single heading: To maintain the secondary status of women."

Similarly, in advocating for a human outcry against crimes of gender violence and specifically "honour" killing, as opposed to one that is specifically a feminist, or woman-centred opposition, Leyla Pervizat stresses the need to re-define honour killing within the community, to expose the ways in which male family members also become victims of an antiquated masculinized ideology—and calls for the need to create space for long-term changes within the culture. Such a "space" and the creation and possible interventions of such a "spatialized" language, she states, could offer individual men an excuse to avoid violence, while it does not marginalize or abandon the larger project of a human rights discourse to provide a framework with which to speak back to the dynamics of gender violence.

Section three starts with an article by Yakin Erturk, the UN special reporter on Violence Against Women, that is entitled: "Violence in the Name of Honour Within the Context of International Regimes". She stresses the ways in which the global patriarchal nature of gender relations continually (re)produces the subordination and inequality of women. She connects the liminal concept of "honour" to power, and argues that understanding of "[t]he issue of honor … in diverse ways in different parts of the world, is important from the point of view of the integration of the individual into the group." She suggest that while crimes of "passion" generally involve violence against women by an intimate partner, femicide is always already implicated within a collective identity that is socially (re)configured by the public reputation of all the actors involved. Hence, she believes that due to the collective nature of the crime, the empowerment of women through international agendas, human rights laws, state, community, and the family is crucial. She concludes by stating: "Last … there is need for deconstructing hegemonic masculinities and engaging in a dialogue and alliance with alternative masculinities that are opposed to oppressive uses of power."

Christina Curry's contribution "Acting With Honour: Justice Not Excuses In Crimes of So-Called 'Honour' " calls on us to use the term "honour" in a different way. She is calling on men and women to act with honour and show respect for each other. She states: "I see a state of 'acting with honour' not when it takes steps to protect all women in that state from violence and to prevent violence against them—because this is their obligation before the law—but when they are world leaders in doing so." Her contribution therefore challenges Turkey as a state to "act honourably" and become a world leader in campaigning against violence against women.

Additionally in section three, in contrast to the investigation of "honour" killings in Turkey, the Swedish contribution raises the importance of recognizing other community struggles, mainly the effects of the increase of both hidden and apparent racism in Sweden, and how such racist perceptions mitigate reactions towards honour crimes. This essay by Niklas Kelemen takes an innovative approach, whereby the author's discussion centres not on women as victims of gender violence, nor on human rights or feminist activists, but rather on men. Kelemen's essay, "The Dialogue Project to Prevent Violence: Discussions with Fathers and Sons," juxtaposes the voices of men with the voice of a Syrian girl who discusses the "ethical" (or unethical), perceptions of men towards "honour" killings.

Section four is a useful appendix of research on violence against women that any researcher on the topic should find very useful. The appendix is divided into sub-categories, which allows for an even more efficacious usage of the information presented.

The main contribution of this edited volume lies in its investigation of Western epistemic practices, which however well meaning, have often created neo-orientalist ideologies that have in fact denied specific groups of people a contextual understanding of their struggles against oppression, and often eliminated serious inquiry by further subjugating them to the unproductive dynamics of an "us"/"them" binary. This volume does much to examine the ways in which Western theoretical positions, sometimes even feminist ones, have shaped policies regarding violence against women, policies which have often (however unwittingly) prevented the formation of a more complete understanding of violence against women, and in understanding the complex political, economic and historical forces in which such violence is often mired.

Since no one can expect a single volume of essays to cover or address every issue that is endemic to such a complex social issue as the crime of femicide, I present the following remarks not so much as criticism but as possible venues for further study. One of the issues that needs further attention is the way in which violence against women is individualized in the West, while it is demonized as a cultural phenomenon elsewhere. When notorious cases of violence against women surface in the West, they are always analyzed as individual aberrations, not as representations of the violent tendencies of Western men as a collective. Critical research studies need to address how such perceptual inconsistencies affect our analysis not just of the crime of femicide, but violence against women more broadly.

As a whole, the volume raises very important issues pertaining to femicide, and these issues are con-

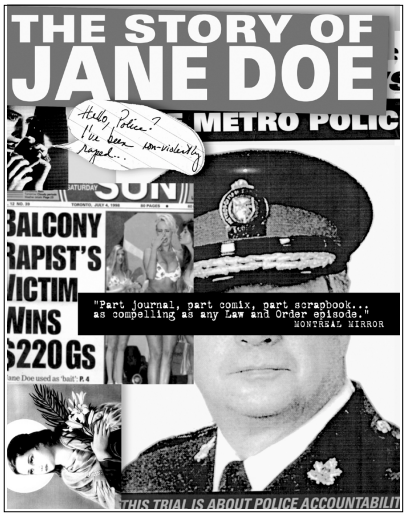
textualized in culturally specific ways, ranging from its consideration in Palestine to Turkey to Sweden etc. Thus covering the issue from the perspective of various societies and various contexts enables the authors to shed light on the salient issues facing us as feminist activists when dealing with femicide. I do wish that the voices of the women who have been directly or indirectly affected by femicide were more seamlessly integrated into the volume, rather than used somewhat sporadically. I admit this is a personal bias, in that in my work not just on femicide, but on women's issues in the region generally, I prefer to have the voices of these women speak as directly as possible. However, I would like to conclude by saying that this collection by Mojab and Abdo is a good start for those who would like to learn about femicide, and understand the ways in which Western perceptions of the crime and Western critical tendencies have affected our understanding of it.

THE STORY OF JANE DOE: A BOOK ABOUT RAPE

Jane Doe
Toronto: Random House of Canada Limited, 2004

REVIEWED BY MARION M. LYNN

In the heat of the summer of 1986, a friend was raped, in her own bed on the third floor of her house, by a serial rapist who had been stalking her Toronto neighbourhood looking for an easy access through a screen door or open window. The police knew what he was doing and were tracking his path. They asked her if she had been sleeping in the nude or wearing a provocative negligee. A woman at the hospital rape crisis centre introduced herself as an expert on rape. When my distraught friend asked this expert about her rape, she retorted that she had never *been* raped, but was a *professional* expert *on* rape through her studies of rape and by helping rape victims.



In the fall of 1986 I was taking a course on violence against women. Lori Haskell, one of the instructors, brought a woman into the class to speak to us about rape. This woman had also been raped in the summer of 1986, by a different serial rapist, stalking a different Toronto neighbourhood. He entered apartments on third and fourth floors through locked balcony doors. She did not speak about studies of rape or her work with rape victims, but from her own recent experience. She was to become an *expert* on rape. She was the woman now known as Jane Doe. This book is her story.

It is also much more than her story. It is the story of the intersection of the personal and the political, of the act of rape at the particular, institutional, social and political levels. The book presents a unique analysis of rape and of one woman's response to having been raped, showing in part that this is a profoundly traumatic act of violence against one woman by one man, and at the same time it is a deep, systemic attack on all women by all men.

The Story of Jane Doe, written in first person by the woman herself, is illustrated with drawings, newspaper reports, her personal journal writing and funny cartoons. It is a disturbing, personal, and tragic, story. It tells how one act on one night can destroy a woman's life, as she knew it, resulting in years of poor physical and mental health, sleep terrors, secrets kept from her family. At the same time, the story of this rape unfolds within a brilliant framework as a public and political act. Jane Doe turns this violent act against her person into a public act involving other women who have been raped – five by the same man. She engages feminist support groups such as Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), convenes community meetings and sues the Metro Toronto Police. She raises questions as to who benefits from this socially constructed and systemically supported form of violence against women. If three-quarters of men would not commit rape, what do they do to prevent this violence against their friends and loved ones? And how does one explain the evidence that up to 80 per cent of rapes are committed by men who are known, who are "friends" and "loved ones" of the woman?

The book is not just about the horrors of rape and the injustice of the justice system. There is life after rape; as Jane Doe says "you can't keep a good woman down." It includes poignant examples of unwavering support and love, from her family as she was growing up to her friends who were her lifeline during the years after the rape. This woman is Jane Doe only in terms of her legal fight; in the rest of her life she works in publishing, teaching and film, has a name and friends, lives an apparently normal life.

Above all else this book is about a woman suing the Metro Toronto Police for negligence in their failure to protect, and of Charter violations in the subsequent investigation of the rape. It provides great detail about what is needed to carry out such a feat. Immediately after the rape WAVAW members help her put up