

Gul Ozyegin (eds)
Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures

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Gul Ozyegin's edited volume, *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures*, is a powerfully illuminating source for exploring a neglected field of study. This volume brings together articles examining how discourses and practices channelled by Muslim identities act upon bodily practices, intimacies, masculinities and femininities in Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. In fact, this collection is not the first comprehensive work debating these issues; *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, edited by Pinar İlkkaracan (2000), has previously dealt with similar dynamics by contemplating how Muslim women's sexual pleasures and bodies are restricted by religion and nationalism. Yet, differently, *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures* refocuses attention to lived experiences of gender and sexuality. The articles in this collection bring along ethnographic and historical accounts; and taken together, they decisively draw on embodied agency, negotiations and divergences. By doing so, this volume provides an excitingly deeper insight into how sexual and gender norms are maintained or contested.

As noted in the introductory chapter by Gul Ozyegin, the theoretical framework is predicated upon the controversies with the essentialized and reified notion of Islam. Islamic discourses and practices are deemed to be interacting with global and local dynamics in specific geographic locations. On that account, formations of Muslim identities are presented in relevance to neoliberal economic restructuring, globalization, Westernization, nation-building and anti-

colonialist ideologies and movements (p.1). In light of this conception, the book presents nineteen cases of gendered and sexual aspects of Muslim identities, which are organized into five thematic parts. Part 1 is primarily focusing on masculinities; the chapters here deal with the ways that hegemonic forms of masculinity are destabilized along with socio-political or economic transformations. In part 2, the chapters provide important accounts of the manifestations of Muslim identities in 'feminine body', conjugal ties and premarital relationships. Part 3 involves the chapters examining the uses of bodies in constructing gendered Muslim identities. Part 4 incorporates debates, on the one hand, on the struggle over women's bodies to ensure their repression, and on the other hand, women's own imaginations and struggles to gain autonomy. Lastly, Part 5, having a glance at experiences in Iran and Iranian diaspora, is devoted to scrutinizing feminist and queer scholarship.

By presenting multifaceted aspects of Muslim majority countries, this volume makes substantial contributions to understanding transformations of gender and sexualities that yield liminality resulting from the juxtaposition of global and local articulations. Global flows of capital, people and ideas are overriding concerns of several authors. Among these, the crisis of masculinities comes to the fore. Cenk Özbay's chapter on shopping malls in Istanbul as a site for a workplace gives a thought-provoking account for these dynamics. His study brings forth the dissolution of boundaries along with socio-economic transformations into a post-industrial urban milieu. He therefore suggests possibilities for autonomy and visibility in women's and queer lives. On the other hand, Salih Can Açıksöz's chapter, examining state-sponsored assisted reproduction for disabled veterans in Turkey, sets another example. He dissects the recuperation of hegemonic masculinity in the making of reproductive citizenship, which draws on neoliberal welfare regimes and familialist discourses of ruling authorities. Mustafa Abdalla's chapter deals with shifting positions of men in neoliberal restructuring of Egypt. Regarding poor young men's sexual and emotional relationships with Western tourist women under the guise of

urfi marriages, he explores men's survival strategies to reinvigorate their masculinity. Likewise, Aisha Anees Malik's research on transnational migrant Pakistani men in UK illustrates how they constitute a more privileged gender identity, in their home countries and UK, through migration and marrying Western women.

Some other authors also suggest possibilities to cultivate more egalitarian and autonomous subjectivities. Fatma Umut Beşpınar's chapter on the rise of *new fatherhood* towards more egalitarian conduct of parenting, among secular segments of middle class men in Turkey, provides a penetrating account for this dimension. She presents middle class men's tendencies to avoid traditional fatherhood, which is characterized by emotional and social distance from children. She demonstrates that a strong desire to disengage from traditional values and a pursuit of westernized lifestyles are exhibited in the rise of new fatherhood. Likewise, Lindsey A. Conklin and Sandra Nasser El-Dine scrutinize the enactment of autonomy in intimate relations in their chapter dissecting the dynamics of premarital relationships among Syrian youth. Setting forth a comparative account, they portray the image of Syrian youth on account of cultural distinctions, and demonstrate how Western values surrounding premarital relationships are drawn.

Apart from these, several authors also examine certain local practices, places and meanings that shape and are shaped by Muslim identities, such as *pardah*, *mahrem*, women's genital cutting and so on. In their perspectives, the role of (especially women's) lived experiences in meaning-making processes is paramount. Hence, the authors offer insightful accounts into how these practices are linked to anti-colonialist ideologies without reducing these local articulations to women's victimhood. For instance, Maria Frederika Malmström and Victoria A. Castillo's chapters, and Faith Barton's interview with Goran A. Sabir Zangana and Maria Frederika Malmström open an intriguing discussion on female genital cutting (FGC). Malmström's ethnographic research on lower class women in Egypt elaborately reveals the gendered aspects of the Muslim purity, and how FGC is imbued with these sensibilities.

Barton's interview with Zangana and Malmström gives an informative account on how to conceptualize FGC and what certain strategies could be employed by academic scholars and policy-makers to deal with this arduous phenomenon. Likewise, Castillo provides a pedagogical perspective for pondering FGC that would potentially guide the feminist circles among scholars, activists and policy-makers.

Saadia Abid's chapter examines Pakistani women's religious dressing of *burqa* as an embodiment of *purdah*. Avoiding narrow interpretations of *purdah*, she provides fascinating observations on this clothing practice, which takes on the meaning of a puritan Muslim identity withstanding Western cultures and values. Jessica Carlisle's chapter on judicial divorce cases in Syria illustrates how religion-based social norms and legislations define the contours of gender normativity in heterosexual marriages. Elyse Semerdjian's analysis of gender relations in the eighteenth-century Ottoman *hammam* in Aleppo indicates the social construct of Ottoman bathhouse as a suspect space for it facilitates encounters between Muslim and non-Muslim women. Sherine Hafez's chapter on women members of Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt reveals how women's bodies are subject to struggles for hegemony between the contrasting political bodies.

In the examination of the local practices and meanings, a few authors set forth the potentials to contest the precepts of gender and sexual ideologies in Muslim majority contexts. Serkan Delice elaborates on homosexual practices and identities in eighteenth-century Ottoman Istanbul. In his analysis of homoeroticism, he depicts that sexual and emotional relationships are signs of the formation of homosexual subculture emanating from male fraternities. Sertaç Sehlükoglu deals with the local institution of *mahrem* incorporating regulatory frameworks for gender relations in Turkey. In her analysis of a couple of *mahrem* practices, she suggests a disobedience to heterosexual cultures in Turkey. Miral Mahgoub Al-Tahawy elaborates women's imaginations reflecting their silenced desires by analysing Arab women's creative self-expression in Egypt. The case of Alifa Rifaat's writing practices is especially stimulating as it demonstrates how women's explicit writing

practices can be a powerful act against Egypt's traditional patriarchal society. Martina Censi reveals that Syrian women writers' novel characters represent women's struggle to enact their individual autonomy and sexual freedom in a socio-political context marked by religion and state authority in Syria. Leila Mouri and Kristin Soraya Batmangelichi's chapter introduces the debates on post-colonial feminist scholarship by analysing the socio-political dynamics informing secular feminist movements in Iran. Their study provides indispensable insight into relationships between feminist political agenda, religion and state. Farhang Rouhani discusses the lived experiences of Iranian diaspora drawing on a case from literary field, namely Jasmin Darznik's memoir, *The Good Daughter*. Employing a queer theoretical perspective, he regards the Iranian diaspora as having creative and emancipatory capacities.

All in all, this collection introduces rich sources of information and seminal approaches to formations of Muslim identities through the lens of gender and sexuality. The articles shed light on the lived experiences by avoiding vague conceptions and overgeneralizations about Muslim cultural contexts. Thus, this collection is an excellent contribution to the literatures of gender studies and Middle East and North African Studies. Besides, the collection would also be helpful for academic scholars and students from a range of disciplines that are interested in diverse implications of global socio-economic transformations, as a number of chapters eloquently debate these global dynamics.

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