

illuminates the complexity of the BDS “movement” as well as transnational solidarity activism more broadly. ✂

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**MARIA HOLT AND HAIFAA JAWAD.** *Women, Islam, and Resistance in the Arab World*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013. ix + 211 pages, preface, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$55.00 ISBN 978-1-58826-925-6.

**S**tandard media and government stereotypes tend to portray women in the Islamic world as powerless, passive victims in need of rescue from abusive men, laws, and governments. Maria Holt and Haifaa Jawad’s *Women, Islam, and Resistance in the Arab World* challenges these stereotypes through in-depth case studies of women in three critical conflict zones: post-civil-war Lebanon, post-invasion Iraq, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The book highlights instances of women’s agency and resistance in the midst of violent warfare. Based on fieldwork involving questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in 2002–2003, 2006–2007, and 2010–2011, Holt and Jawad analyze the interplay among violence, religious faith, and women’s presence in crisis situations, ultimately concluding that Islam serves as a source of comfort and strength, and a tool of empowerment, albeit at the individual level, for Arab Muslim women in conflict zones.

The most important contribution of this work is its original data set, particularly the chapter on Iraqi women, which represents the first in-depth fieldwork on the experiences of Iraqi women living in exile in Syria and Jordan. Particularly informative is the recognition of the triple challenges faced by Iraqi women—namely, the U.S.-led invasion and subsequent occupation government, the rise of Iraqi militias, and sectarian violence—all of which victimized women in different ways, whether through direct abuse and humiliation, loss of family members, forced exile, or removal from jobs and the accompanying loss of livelihood. The chapter challenges government and media portrayals of the U.S.-led “liberation” of Iraq, looking at its impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who lost their jobs, homes, families, and, most of all, personal security. This led to the rise of a strong, broad-based group of resistance movements, the most important of which are the Iraqi National Foundation Congress and the Association of Muslim Scholars, neither of which has been acknowledged by the U.S.

government. Instead, the U.S. maintains a narrative of the opposition as being “confined to a relatively small geographical area with vested personal interests” (110), and as being necessarily linked to “foreign terrorism” (112). Holt and Jawad provide an indigenous counter-narrative by showing the spread of the opposition to major cities, and across both sectarian and class lines, while decrying the U.S.’s discouragement of “any attempt by any credible researcher to have access to fair and balanced information” (112). Their description of human rights atrocities and deliberate inflammation of sectarian issues by U.S. forces and the regime it supports establishes a context of humiliation, despair, and terror that clearly sets the stage for the subsequent rise of ISIS, making this chapter a must-read for policymakers and counterterrorism officials.

The book also makes a contribution in comparative Sunni–Shi‘a studies, although it is often left to the reader to fully draw out comparisons and contrasts. For example, the use of symbolic figures and events is presented clearly and specifically in the case of Shi‘i women in Lebanon, while Sunni examples are addressed more broadly without specific reference to Palestine or Iraq. To their credit, Holt and Jawad provide extensive contextualization of the historical background to women’s contemporary experiences in all three countries, focusing largely on political and military issues leading up to the conflict and their impact on ordinary women’s lives. However, in some instances, such as the West Bank and Gaza, so much time is spent on contextualization that they never get to the extended analysis of the interviews they conducted. There are also times when the arguments appear to be contradictory, as the line between victimization and empowerment is often fuzzy and depends on perspective. Daily survival, for instance, occurs within the context of victimization and is often arbitrary; however, Holt and Jawad note that many of the women interviewed consider their survival—and the survival of at least some of their children—to constitute an act of resistance because it defies the threatened violence.

Overall, the book makes important contributions in terms of the data presented and the counter-narratives suggested. Nevertheless, its assertions of the agency and empowerment of women in war zones tend to fall short as the overwhelming nature of the circumstances of victimization show that women may be able to achieve some level of control over their own lives at the individual level but have not yet turned this into collective empowerment. ✦

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