

Terror, Counter-Terror: Women Speak Out

Ammu Joseph and Kalpana Sharma, eds.

London and New York: Zed Books, 2003. 283 pages.

Terror, Counter-Terror: Women Speak Out presents articles by several women writers and women's organizations. The book analyzes and interrogates the madness of male-dominated war and violence, and presents women's perspectives on war and the 9/11 tragedy. Contributors include feminist writers, authors, academics, and journalists; mothers, women of color, Muslim women; and women who have had first-hand experience with war and its effects.

The editors provide an excellent critical reappraisal of the ideas, concepts, and language that underpin the multilayered world of war, power, and peace. The book also explores diverse women's perspectives on the failure of war to bring about peace. In giving their perspective, the authors respond eloquently and defiantly to war's destructive nature. This collection, a wonderful anthology of women's experiences of war, allows the reader to capture the suffering of war as well as its paradoxes, double standards, and contradictions. The essays are organized into seven sections: "Personal and Political," "The War on Terror," "Saying No," "Motherland/ Fatherland," "The War on Women," "Displaced and Dispossessed," and "Women against War."

The book highlights the wars in Afghanistan and Israel and the 9/11 tragedy. The authors lament that war has never really brought peace, but rather turmoil and human and economic suffering. Most people in the West see sanitized images of war that are carefully selected for them. *Women Speak Out* tells the story of how losing one's children, home, and livelihood are part of war's true horrors.

The section dealing with the "Personal and Political" comprises three chapters. The first, by Subeir Hammad, a Palestinian-American, is titled "First Writing." It consists of poetry that challenges the notion that all Arabs are evil. She points out that white men were not vilified after Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred F. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma; however, Arabs as a whole were targeted after the 9/11 tragedy. Robin Morgan's "Ghost and Echoes" draws on some of the themes mentioned by Hammad and introduces us even more to the confusion and chaos that existed in New York after the attack. She also documents the post-9/11 persecution of Muslims.

Nelofer Pazira's paper, "War: Violation of Human Life," gives a first-hand account of her lived experience in war-ravaged Afghanistan. She questions whether people in the West really understand what it is like to live in a war zone. She asserts that for many westerners, war heroes are Hollywood's creation. Yet she notes that for people like herself, who have experienced war's reality, there are no heroes – only victims – and that the effects on women and children who survive are largely ignored.

The section "War on Terror" begins with Rohini Hensman's work on the themes of communalism, militarism, and machismo. She argues that Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush both try to create an "us versus them" and a "good versus evil" dichotomy. She also criticizes the double standard wherein acts of violence against American citizens are considered terrorism, while the same acts against non-American citizens tend not to

be. The chapters by Pazira, Rubina Saigol, Rosalind Petchesky, Susan Hawthorne, Vandana Shiva, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Suchita Vemuri examine the theme of masculinity and war and expose the devastating effects of women's lived experiences of war. They also look at the double standards and contradictions inherent in war and violence. The loss of human rights for Arabs, colonialism, imperialism, racism, and sexism are other major themes discussed throughout the anthology.

The papers in this section point to Bin Laden's misogynistic attitude, as well as women's victimization within the United States and globally. Both Hawthorne and Shiva address globalization and its effect on ordinary people. Interestingly, Shiva focuses on bioterrorism after 9/11 and argues that when economic policies and globalization deliberately spread such diseases as AIDS, TB, and malaria, this should also be described as bioterrorism.

Questions of the double standards between the North and South are also central to this book. Sunera Thobani, Susan Sontag, Madeleine Bunting, Kalpana Sharma, and Kamila Shamsie debunk stereotypes of oppression and suppression in the South, arguing that the North is a major perpetrator of oppression and colonization in the South. Thobani gives a startling account of how she was labeled an "uppity woman of colour," a "hate-monger," and an "idiot" when she spoke up against American foreign policy. Sontag refers to this kind of censorship as "stifling debate."

In the section "Motherland/Fatherland," Martha Nussbaum, Ellen Willis, Barbara Kingsolver, Barbara Ehrenreich, Rosa Brooks, and Dubravka Ugresic give an account of how fundamentalist world religions exercise power over women. In the section "War on Women," which I believe could aptly be the title of this anthology, Humera Khan, Gayle Forman, Elizabeth Schulte, Ayesha Khan, Fahima Akhtar, and Anuradha Chenoy detail the impact of war on women. Humera Khan levels heavy criticism against those westerners who suddenly care about Muslim women in the Middle East being oppressed while doing nothing to stop the oppression of the poor and women of color in their own backyard. She compares women wearing the burqa and scantily clad women in the North. For example, she notes that "while the Taliban were imposing their beliefs and reducing freedom on one side, the same can be said of the male-dominated and often misogynistic fashion industry on the other" (p. 153). She then argues that people in the West should focus on whether or not a war launched by the world's richest nation against the poorest was necessary.

In the section "Displaced and Disposed," Sonia Jabber, Amira Hass, Anisa Darwish, and Gila Svirsky write from a personal level about how war

causes dispossession. The women also write of the sexism they experience in their home country as well as outside of it. In the final section, “Women against War,” several women and women’s organizations speak out against war: Barbara Lee (an African American woman), the Violence against Women in War Network in Japan, Women Living under Muslim Laws, Rigoberta Menchu (a Quiche Mayan woman and Noble Peace Prize winner [1992] living in Guatemala), Diverse Women for Diversity, Bat Shalom, the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Transnational Feminists, and the Worldwide Sisterhood against Terrorism and War. In this section, an excellent collection of women unite and plead for peace.

Ultimately, this book is about resistance and defiance. The women who wrote these papers should be commended for their bravery in condemning war. It puts a special spin on the global hatred of Muslims since 9/11, as people in the West are constantly inundated with one-sided propaganda from media such as CNN and *Time* magazine. To read about the perspectives of diverse groups of women adds a very important, but usually missing, piece to the debate over the issue of war. This book also serves to debunk stereotypes of Islam and Muslim women in particular and is useful for courses in peace studies, women’s studies, political science, Middle Eastern studies, women’s literature, social movements, and world history.

Erica Neegan
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
erica.neegan@utoronto.ca