

References

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Karin Mlodoch, *The Limits of Trauma Discourse: Women Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2014, 541 pp., (ISBN: 978-3-87997-719-2).

Building upon her twenty years of involvement in the region, in *The Limits of Trauma Discourse: Women Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq*, Karin Mlodoch provides a detailed historical account of the so-called Anfal campaign, mainly through the narrations of the Anfal women, the survivors of this extreme violence. Al-Anfal campaign is the name of an extensive military operation against the Kurdish people living in Northern Iraq in 1988 that led to the death, disappearing, displacement, and village destructions in the thousands. Dedicated to conveying women's "own subjective perspective on their Anfal experience" (p. 19), Mlodoch aims to demonstrate the long-term effect of this violence on women's lives by listening to their own narratives. Frequently defined as "victims" and by the loss of their relatives in the existing literature, Anfal women are stripped off their agency; yet Mlodoch introduces a counter gender-based analysis that pays attention to their subjective experiences of loss and ongoing violence, along with their responses to these traumatic events in line with the continuous transformation of their lives. In doing so, the author does not limit her analysis to individual experiences; instead, she demonstrates the ways in which political, social, and economic factors, as well as traditional patriarchal structures, have influenced how women remember and cope with this event. Thus, the book goes beyond the documentation of violence and trauma by providing the reader with an account of how Anfal women have collectively mobilized their resources towards building their own lives under the circumstances of ongoing violence in the region.

In her book, Mlodoch sets the Al-Anfal campaign as the beginning point for analysis, then proceeds to examine the major developments that have happened since then, namely the Gulf War in 1991, the Iraq War in 2003 that led to the fall of the Baath regime, and the post-2003 process that brought relative security and stability to the Kurdistan Region. The book is mainly divided into three time-periods throughout its seventeen chapters. Firstly, Mlodoch focuses on the lives of Anfal women beginning from the Anfal

campaign until the Gulf War in 1991; this section examines their experiences of living under the control of the Baath regime--the perpetrators of genocide--as they suffer the impact of this extreme violence. Secondly, Mlodoch examines the time period between the Gulf War and the establishment of the provisional autonomy of the Kurdistan Region until the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003. While analysing the survivors' narratives, she highlights the changing context in which security and autonomy was assured to a certain extent with the enactment of a no-fly zone. However, strict traditional patriarchal values, economic hardships, and ongoing threats to security continue to regulate women's lives, as she demonstrates. And lastly, Mlodoch focuses on the post-2003 period that has been marked by rapid economic improvement and the restoring of the sense of security in Iraqi Kurdistan, which has caused a sense of relief and hope for Anfal women in their quest to find information about their missing relatives and to achieve justice. However, the delay in the transitional justice process by the Iraqi central government and the neglect of the Kurdistan Regional Government towards Anfal women leads to frustration and disappointment among these women. Still, they manage to build their own lives by raising their kids, who then provide them with social and economic security. For each of these time-periods, Mlodoch presents a complex account of the social, political, and economic dynamics of the time, accompanied by the personal narratives of Anfal women that show the ways in which they tackle with these changing structures and circumstances. Considering the fact that Mlodoch's main argument emphasises the dialectical relationship between survivors' narratives and the changing social, economic and political structures, the structure of the book enables her to prove her argument by analyzing the changing circumstances of each and every period and the ways in which Anfal women experience, narrate and tackle with these transformations.

In terms of its conceptual framework, the book applies to three areas--namely, trauma, memory, and reconciliation. Mlodoch situates her research within the existing literature by addressing the lack of psychological perspective in the current discussions specifically around Anfal and generally around political reconciliation. Simultaneously, she challenges the clinical psychological research methods that focus on collecting quantitative data of the symptoms while analyzing trauma. Instead, Mlodoch approaches trauma as a "politically and socially contextualized and gendered" (p. 29) concept, and underlines the "interwoven character of women's individual and collective memories" (p. 29) by highlighting the effects of changing social, political and economic contexts on women's narrations. Consistent with her conceptual framework, Mlodoch's methodology is very much shaped by the contribution of her subjects. Throughout the book, the narratives of Anfal women are immensely detailed, including gaps, silences, and emotions, which are also integrated into the analysis. The processes in which the narratives evolve and transform are privileged over single moments. In line with her dedication to not to erase women's subjective agencies, Mlodoch successfully challenges the sidelining of

women survivors' experiences by squeezing them into categories of "waiting" and "frozen in the past" (p. 18). She contributes to the literature not solely through "adding" women's narratives into the history, but also by demonstrating the ways in which the changing social, political, and economic conditions since 1988 are gendered (Scott, 1986). While doing that, she presents an extensive description of traditional patriarchal rules and expectations (that are changing in line with the social, political, and economic transformation) and demonstrates how these expectations shape women's lives in the aftermath of the Anfal campaign. By following these women's lives over time, Mlodoch is able to demonstrate the shift in their lives and in the social structures to which they belong. Her analysis demonstrates that as the second-generation survivors grow and take responsibility of the household, the collective solidarity networks that Anfal women have created right after the tragedy start to dissolve. The women-only collective solidarity networks give way to traditional understanding of family. In regard to the methodology, the only point that remains to be elaborated is the researcher's positionality as an "external listener" (p. 240) who works as a humanitarian aid worker and as a member of an NGO while conducting her research. Even though Mlodoch gives the reader detailed information about her access to the field, her position towards her subjects is not incorporated into her later analysis of Anfal women's narrations. Considering the extended literature on the fast-growing number of NGOs in Iraqi Kurdistan right after the abolishment of Baath regime (Mojab & Gorman, 2007), and the feminist criticisms against this process for reproducing a top-down approach (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009), her analysis in the second half of the book (specifically the post-2003 period) requires a reflection on her position.

Overall, I believe Mlodoch's book will be of particular interest not only to psychologists, but also to historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and scholars of gender studies who are interested in the discussions of trauma, memory and political reconciliation and more generally the social, political and economic transformation of the region.

References

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