

BOOK REVIEW

Bearing Witness: Uniting Arabyya and Chicana Methodologies

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Women Resisting Sexual Violence and the Egyptian Revolution: Arab Feminist Testimonies. By Manal Hamzeh. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020. Pp. 272. \$85.50 (hardcover).

At its core, Manal Hamzeh's *Women Resisting Sexual Violence and the Egyptian Revolution: Arab Feminist Testimonies* is not meant to be romantic or nostalgic, nor a narrative of sexual violence designed to victimize the women of the *suwret yanayer* (the Arabic term for the Egyptian January 25 Revolution of 2011) to elicit sympathy. Rather, the work is a call for transnational affinity where readers bear witness not only to the state-sanctioned violence of a regime anchored in coloniality but, more importantly, to the radical work of women in resistance. Hamzeh's ability to create space for the women and center their experiences in her work is admirable, for she provides them with the opportunity to exercise agency over their representation. The *shahadat* (accounts of personal truth through testimonios) in Hamzeh's work are not only a powerful display of lived experience as Arabyya (Arab feminist) methodology, but a recovery of authority over the narrative "about the Arab revolutions of 2011, and particularly about Egyptian women in *suwret yanayer*" (3). Furthermore, the *shahadat*, alongside Chicana *testimonio* praxis, demonstrates the potential in sharing and examining Chicana and Arabyya responses to state-sanctioned violence collectively, to reveal new understandings of coloniality as an interconnected matrix of power and transnational solidarity as a praxis of resistance through collaborative knowledge-making.

Samira Ibrahim, Yasmine El Baramawy and Ola Shahba, the *essuwar* (the revolutionists), and their ongoing resistance are at the heart of Hamzeh's theorizing about Arabyya methodology. In the aftermath of *Suwret khamsah* (*ou'ishreen yanayer*, the January 25 Revolution), and well into the continued struggle, the *essuwar* experienced sexual violence at the hands of the state. Although Hamzeh is attentive in representing and translating Samira, Yasmine, and Ola's *shahadat*, she makes it clear that the work is collaborative, not singular, "bringing an Arabyya methodology to this project meant building and maintaining trust relationships . . . a solidarity-centered project in which those collaborating hear each other" (11). Hamzeh's collaborative writing with the *essuwar* continues the process of reimagining the Egyptian revolution, resistance, and Arabyya representation through the process of *shahada* and *haki*, which are fleshed out below.

Women Resisting Sexual Violence and the Egyptian Revolution: Arab Feminist Testimonies is situated at the intersection of Chicana, Arabyya, and transnational feminist epistemologies to represent the struggle against coloniality, patriarchy, capitalism, and branching systems of oppression as one that is collaborative across physical and imagined borders. As Hamzeh explains, this specific Arabyya methodology is practiced through narrative, witnessing, and *haki*— "a more give-and-take conversation" (14) which works to record experiences of state-sanctioned violence, dispossession, and resistance. This Arabyya methodology, referred to as *shahadat-haki*, encourages breaking silences collaboratively through the personal. By telling their *shahadat*, the *essuwar* are able to bridge Arabyya efforts with other transnational feminist groups towards a critically conscious movement inclusive of all women.

The work of Manal Hamzeh is key to understanding knowledge-making as a praxis that exists outside of academia and as one which must be driven by

transnational solidarity. Her work “as a rupturing space” (123) is an invitation to participate in the reclaiming of agency over historical narratives by bearing witness to the personal accounts of Samira, Yasmine, and Ola, a process that aligns with queer Chicana Emma Pérez’s call for an uncovering of “silences and gaps” (2003, 123) in history. *Women Resisting Sexual Violence and the Egyptian Revolution: Arab Feminist Testimonies* is an emotionally driven, vulnerable, and immensely accessible text that fosters a sense of hope in the ongoing process of resistance against imperialism.

The courage of the *essuwar* in expressing their deeply personal accounts of sexual violence during the Egyptian Revolution is both provocative and inspiring. In voicing their *shahadat*, not only is resistance and solidarity across cultures encouraged, but the *essuwar* are redirecting the shame of sexual violence onto the perpetrators: the state. The combined efforts of Arabyya and Chicana oral traditions, represented in Hamzeh’s engagement with Chicana *testimonio* praxis, builds on the potential of coalition by highlighting the act of witnessing. In the Latina Feminist Group’s *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2011), *testimonio* is thought to enable the body to re/member institutionalized violence. The act of witnessing across physical and imagined borders facilitates a collective sense of re/membering, of connecting Chicana, Arabyya, and other transnational feminist groups. The blending of *testimonio* and witnessing further legitimizes the counternarratives of women resisting regimes grounded in coloniality. Hamzeh’s *Women Resisting Sexual Violence and the Egyptian Revolution: Arab Feminist Testimonies* encourages us to learn with the *essuwar*, to witness their resistance, and to seek justice through transnational coalition and listening.

References

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