

Book Review

Domestic Violence in Asia: Globalization, Gender and Islam in the Maldives

Emma Fulu. London & New York: Routledge, 2014. 192 pages

Pan Wang
University of Technology Sydney, Australia

The book *Domestic Violence in Asia: Globalization, Gender and Islam in the Maldives* comes out in a timely manner as it raises public awareness of the hidden phenomenon of rising violence against women in the Maldives at a time when that society is undergoing dramatic changes in the wave of globalization. The core value of the book lies in its provision of a new conceptual framework which analyses and situates domestic violence in the context of social change and globalization. That is, rather than focusing on the reasons and tragic consequences of domestic violence and examining the phenomenon at the personal level, Emma Fulu takes a holistic approach by investigating the changing factors associated with intimate partner violence on both micro (individual, family) and macro (community, national and global) level of the society and proposes the corresponding solutions to harness this trend. Hence the book not only serves as a valuable resource for scholars to (re)conceptualize domestic violence but also provides clues for state and legal institutions to reform and implement new policies in various sectors in response to the social problem of domestic violence.

As a start, the book follows a seemingly reverse order. It begins by examining the patterns of intimate partner violence in the Maldivian context through several case studies, which demonstrates similarities to the gendered types and characteristics of domestic violence in Asia at large. Instead of exploring the severity of growing domestic violence, Emma Fulu presents the factors that have helped to maintain a lower domestic violence rate in the Maldives from past to present. These include but are not limited to the flexible nature of marriage and divorce, open attitudes toward divorce, relatively equal gender relations, low crime rate, support networks of kinship and community, and civilized

behaviours based on peace and calmness in relation to the ideal notion of masculinity (pp. 52-63).

In the following chapters, Emma Fulu argues that the entrenched values toward marriage and divorce and the historical nature of the Maldivian culture are yet being challenged and disrupted by the forces of globalization. Her ethnographic research shows the double-edged nature of globalization. While globalization has accelerated economic growth and revolutionized the ways of social production, it has led to structural changes such as migration and urbanization which have resulted in wealth disparity and gender inequality, subsequently placing women in an economically marginalized position and hence prone to domestic violence; while globalization has created discourses on women's rights and has brought the issue of domestic violence to the spotlight, it has eroded many of the "protective factors" that historically prevented women from being abused. While globalization has enabled the influx of western/modern notions of love and romance, it has paradoxically bred increasingly conservative Islamic discourses which reject external influences by navigating the country to the opposite tack.

To deconstruct the adverse impact of globalization which challenges the "protective factors" of a low-violence rate society, the book highlights the geopolitical factor of space – due to the urbanization and re-configuration of houses, the emerging divide between the private and the public has worsened the situation of domestic violence in local Maldives communities. As Fulu argues, the political impact of privatization of space has overthrown the traditional way of living and constrained women's mobility and socialization, creating gendered hierarchy in the community and increasing the risk of (silencing) violence against women.

Another salient phenomenon pointed out by Emma Fulu is the revival /backlash of Islam and the dissemination of conservative religious discourse in Maldivian society. This observation merits attention as it shows that resistance to globalization (perceived as Western influence) can unpredictably rekindle nationalism and generate an opposing and contradictory effect, especially when politics and religion are intertwined and utilized by religious fundamentalists. Indirectly, when the institution of marriage is redefined by the state within an enforced Islamic framework, such as the implementation of a new family law, women become

the victims of such political machinery (p. 75).

As the author asserts, “the rise of conservative Islamism has been instrumental in creating a more patriarchal family ideology,” and it is thus the shift of ideology that guides the Maldivian citizens to adhere to the renewed social expectation of gender roles – a man being the “boss” of the household and a woman being obedient to her husband (p. 78). Such doctrine echoes the Confucian ideology that valorized male dominance and female obedience in ancient China. This ideological shift similarly legitimizes an unequal relationship between men and women as an important element for maintaining social harmony and political stability as in feudal times.

In the final chapter, the book underscores the negative social implications of globalisation in the Maldives - fragmented communities, weakened cohesiveness of the neighbourhood, economic inequality, high unemployment rate among youth, an epidemic of drug use, a rise in crime accompanied by a growing incidence of sexual assault and violence against women, the popularity of gang violence as a demonstration of masculinity and power. While discussing the “social crisis” in the Maldivian context, Emma Fulu draws findings from other scholarly literature which discusses the correlation between the social problems and intimate partner violence.

Overall, *Domestic Violence in Asia: Globalization, Gender and Islam in the Maldives* features valuable theoretical contributions to the analysis of domestic violence. It is clearly written, nicely structured, and with helpful citations of well selected quotes from survivors of domestic violence. The research data, collected from interviews, a focus group, and a survey by the author, are well presented and neatly woven into her discussion of the topic of domestic violence in the Maldives. However, a critical note for the book is that despite the fact that its focus is on domestic violence in the Maldives, more comparison and statistics to examine domestic violence in various countries/regions in Asia could have been included, as the title of the book suggests.

Biographical Note: **Wang Pan** is a Research Associate at the China Research Centre, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney. Her most recent publication is 'The Rise of Chinese-Foreign Marriage in Mainland China (1979-2010),' *China Information*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (with Elaine Jeffreys). Her book *Love and Marriage in Globalizing China* (Routledge, forthcoming) examines the phenomenon of intercultural marriage in the People's Republic of China and how it is presented in the Chinese media from the 1980s to present. Her research interests include intercultural marriage and family, gender, contemporary China, as well as Chinese media studies. E-mail: jiayizhen119@gmail.com