

Review of Zahra Tizro, *Domestic Violence in Iran: Women, Marriage and Islam* (Iranian Studies series), London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 268 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-60261-7

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Many publications on gender relations and domestic violence assume, almost as a matter of course, that secularization and modernization will unquestionably lead to improvement of the position of women. With her book *Domestic Violence in Iran: Women, Marriage and Islam*, Zahra Tizro challenges this notion by arguing that domestic violence 'is deeply rooted in society and situated in the fundament of current discourses'. Her aim is to investigate the local conditions and factors that lead to spouse abuse in Iranian society.

Using Foucault's structure of power, knowledge and subjectivity as an 'analytics of power', the author investigates these local conditions and factors of spouse abuse in three fields: orthodox jurisprudence, the concept of marriage and marital relationships and affiliated discourses, and jurisprudence based discourses on gender-difference and gender-equality.

Tizro's specific method is the interview. In order to explore and investigate the perspective of the parties involved, namely women, men, and the judicial system, Tizro applies 'reflexive methodology', which, according to the author, reflects closely the concerns of feminist methodology. Based on the characteristics of 'careful interpretation' and 'reflection', reflexive methodology enables her to address participants' interpretations, their way of constructing arguments and making sense of their experiences and the social reality that causes or justifies violence against women.

In the introduction, Tizro claims that violence against women originates 'from a social system of deep-rooted inequality and patriarchy' (p. 1). She elaborates this argument throughout the rest of the book.

In the first chapter, the author investigates the roots and causes of violence as a universal phenomenon. In the second chapter, the specific Iranian Islamic context is examined, with a special focus on Islamic orthodox jurisprudence.

Tizro describes how orthodox jurisprudence influences the discourses regarding women and their role in the Islamic order: through the judicial system and educational institutions, and especially by using its power as 'image-maker'. The second part of this chapter takes a closer look at the orthodox-jurisprudential discourses on marriage, marriage relationships and gender in contemporary Iran. The author argues that, as specific jurisprudential interpretations of verses in the Qur'an and of certain Shi'ite sources are represented in the marriage contract, the contract itself constitutes the foundation for the justification of violence against women. Chapter 3 sets out the design and methodology used by the author for her research. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the empirical data are presented: analyses of the interviews with the three main parties involved as identified by the author: judicial officials representing the judicial system, women and men. The judicial system (Chapter 4), strongly adhering to traditional logic, stresses the orthodox order of gender relations, encouraging women's obedience within the marital relationship and their adherence to customs and traditions within society. The interviews show an awareness of tensions between religious rulings, Iranian law, social norms and reality. The chapter on women's experiences and their understanding of domestic violence (Chapter 5) is divided into two parts. The first one discusses types of violence such as physical, psychological, economic and sexual, whereas the second part considers possible reasons for violence: social, cultural, economic and personal factors, ranging from powerful mothers-in-law to suspicion and male sexual jealousy. Tizro's argument that domestic violence 'is situated in the fundament of current discourses', is illustrated by an insightful section of this chapter describing a discussion with a group of educated young women who have to deal with the forces of modernity on the one hand and orthodox jurisprudence on the other. The discussion reveals how, despite the high level of training and autonomy of this generation of young and educated women, traditional discourses are not replaced by discourses on equality and women's rights. Once they have found a marriage partner, young women 'are deeply attached to the mainstream set of discourses on the nature of femininity, masculinity and the ideal of gender relations' (p. 163) and are eager to adopt a traditional and socially acceptable lifestyle by turning to the domestic sphere. Unlike the older generation of women, young women develop strategies of subversion in order to serve their own interest or get more freedom of movement. In fact, young women redefine restrictions being imposed on them as a sign of love, whereas in later stages of marriage they understand such 'protective behaviour' as male suspicion or pride. So, the normative gendered hierarchies within the marital relation are not challenged. The same applies to the role of men as money providers. The interviews with men (Chapter 6) show that some of them can hardly meet the financial demands of their wives, leading to tension in the relationship, and sometimes to violence. This chapter makes abundantly clear that social and cultural factors greatly affect men's behaviour in marriage; their prestige within the community is largely determined by the way they control their wife. The power of gossip reinforces discourses on femininity, masculinity and gender roles.

The author concludes that disharmony in marital relations emerges as a result of the orthodox model of the marital contract in combination with deep-rooted social-cultural patriarchal notions and expectations surrounding marriage and the role and position of men and women within it (p. 205). Men do not only profit from their position as husband, however, and in some senses 'are

becoming the new losers in the unequal formulation of the orthodox marriage equation', since with their duty to 'deliver a better life, and women's duty to deliver a better sex life, the pressure on both sides of the equation is translated in more financial demands on men' (p. 212). Importantly, new opinions and regulations in the field of jurisprudence do emerge, which the author discusses briefly. These new discourses, however, did not penetrate the judicial system so far, which is except by law also guided by tradition. Since these reform-minded jurisprudential discourses on the position of women are not 'creating a major push for change in the life of ordinary people in Iran' (p. 223), the author chooses not to discuss them in great detail. Yet in the final chapter, Tizro concludes that a possible strategy to reduce domestic violence in the long-term cannot be successful without the emergence of alternative discourses and lifestyles within the framework of religion, backed by religious orthodoxy.

By employing Foucault's conceptions of violence and of power-knowledge-subjectivity, the author succeeds in presenting a systematic and thorough analysis of her empirical material. The structure of the book is clear and well organized, with introductory chapters about theories, methodology and their relation to the Iranian context, three chapters analysing interviews with the three main parties involved, and a concluding chapter.

Throughout the book, the author elaborates on how gender inequality and traditional gender roles are reinforced in the Iranian legal and social spheres whereas in the private space traditional roles are under pressure due to forces such as modern social life and women's education. Zahra Tizro describes convincingly and in detail the complex of consequences of these modern developments within the marital relationship.

The subject of women's rights is a major topic in Iran. Nevertheless, obtaining and accessing information regarding different aspects of violence in this society is a formidable challenge. A great quality of this book is that it provides insight in the perceptions of both women and men about marriage relationships and about the reasons, understandings, and types of spouse abuse.

With this study and its theoretical and methodological approach, Zahra Tizro has opened up fresh insights in the examination of the issues of jurisprudence, gender relations and domestic violence in a contemporary Islamic society. For those interested in a thorough study of these topics, Zahra Tizro's book is one that must be read.