face of a deteriorating state structure, Saddam Hussein strengthened the power of tribal leaders and compromised women's rights as a bargaining power. The justification for 'honour killings' was an effective strategy in return for tribal leaders' loyalty to Saddam Hussein.

After 9/11, Condoleezza Rice, the other female US Secretary of State, became one of the architects of the war on Iraq. Since then, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have died, WMDs were not found, and there was no link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. But today under the West's military occupation, the remnants of his regime are fighting side by side with al-Qaeda and other extremists. The climate of fear, threat of kidnapping, abduction and sexual violence against women has intensified to an unprecedented level. Under these circumstances, as this important book demonstrates, even the Shi'i and Kurdish women who hated Saddam Hussein do not believe that they are liberated by the invaders. On the contrary their gender, ethnic and religious interests have been stamped on by the invaders' economic and geopolitical interests.

Feminisms, democracy and human rights issues have been hijacked by Western governments to justify war and sanctions in Iraq, the rest of the Middle East and Central Asia. Western feminists must listen and learn from the diverse voices of Iraqi women and as feminists must break their silence and raise their voices against the crimes that their governments continue to commit against women in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine in the name of feminism and democracy.

Elaheh Rostami-Povey

doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400400

Leaving Beirut: women and the wars within

Mai Ghoussoub; Saqi Books, 2nd edition, 2007, 188p, ISBN 978-0-86356-676-9, US\$14.95 (Pbk)

Mai Ghoussoub's *Leaving Beirut* is a complex and poignant book. Strewn with references ranging from al-Mutannabi to *Farewell My Concubine* to Bataille, it is an exploration of the possibilities for coexistence and life after violence. Reissued after the author's unexpected death in February 2007 with a forward by British writer Maggie Gee, *Leaving Beirut* is as relevant and powerful today as it was when originally published in 1998. Traversing continents and eras, Ghoussoub's reflections echo loudly across the disintegrating political situation in Lebanon, the devastations of Iraq and Palestine, and other reverberations of violence around the world.

The book opens with a phone call from Beirut. The narrator, a woman living in Paris, hangs up without speaking. The voice on the line is that of her former lover,

a Palestinian comrade and fighter from the refugee camps in Lebanon where she was once a volunteer. It is a voice that represents the civil war, the 'amputated memories of a torn city that had once been hers', and its incommensurability with her life in exile. That night, she dreams of Mme Nomy, her teacher at Lycee in Lebanon, to whom most of the book is addressed. Mme Nomy once scolded our protagonist for the desire to take revenge. This lesson remained with her for years to come, and *Leaving Beirut* takes up the questions it left in its wake. What are the relationships between retribution and justice, heroism and betrayal, honour and responsibility, tolerance and judgment? Does reconciliation require forgiveness; does forgiveness require the burial of memory?

Throughout, Ghoussoub asks her questions through a series of intimate portraits, vignettes, and musings, and allows the answers – or rather, the possibilities – to emerge gradually through the choices of her subjects. We meet Fadwa, a woman consumed by the vengeance she enacted over many years on her unfaithful husband, and Kirsten, a consciously self-sacrificing 'good-hearted Western liberal' in love with the 'Third World' who enacts her revenge on her late husband's lover by erasing her from the memory of his life. We meet Noha Samman, the 'fiancée of the south' who chose to die for her country in Lebanon, and 'Saint Flora, the Virgin-Martyr', who chose to die for her Christianity in Andalusian Spain. And we meet Latifa and Said, both empowered by their participation in the Lebanese civil war. Latifa joined the fighters to escape a life of abuse as a maid, and Ghoussoub depicts her transformation into legendary fighter Umm Ali as far removed from revenge for that abuse: 'She looked beyond life, instead of looking back into it. She stepped into another reality and had no desire to remember the ugliness that had suffocated her' (p. 78). Said was a well-liked delivery boy for his father's grocery store who became a fighter notorious for his ruthlessness. He provides a vehicle through which Ghoussoub contemplates 'the unacceptable reality that the line that separates the criminal from the next-door neighbour, the helpful lad from the torturer, is not as clear as I had always thought before the civil war' (p. 82).

Ghoussoub's feminism threads through *Leaving Beirut's* vignettes and reflections, as she consciously disrupts gendered understandings of war, violence, victimhood, and vengeance. The image of a woman attacking an enemy prisoner with a hammer because she held him responsible for her brother's death is a recurrent one. When the woman's attack is stopped, Ghoussoub asks pointedly whether this had something to do with her sex: 'Did they try to stop her because she was acting as a "hysterical woman"?' A gentler critique of gendered associations of women as belonging to the nation emerges in her nuanced analysis of Robert Capa's photograph of the *tondue* of Chantres, a woman whose head was shaved because she slept with a German during the Nazi occupation of France. Ghoussoub's discussion of the photo takes us through questions about

the spectacle of public punishment, public humiliation as revenge, and the specifically feminine figure of the 'sexual collaborator'.

Re-reading *Leaving Beirut* in 2007, one is struck by its enduring relevance. In an early chapter, when the narrator returns to Beirut, she reflects on her own discomfort with the way that memory of the war had been paved over by new concrete and restaurants. Recalling Mme Nomy's lesson to forgive and forget, Ghoussoub questions her malaise with Lebanon's apparent amnesia, asking 'Can one forget and learn lessons for the future? Is there a way to forget – to live, laugh, make love, bring up new babies and create – without once having to ask: "And why would it not start all over again?"' (p. 35). Today there is no comforting answer to Ghoussoub's questions, with Lebanon once again on the verge of collapse into hauntingly similar violence. This insight emerges in relation to the current climate in the United States as well. In her musings on the similarities between the Stalinist purges and McCarthyite witch-hunts, Ghoussoub observes that the 'exacerbated nationalism' in which both were rooted 'went hand in hand with an obsession with security, meaning that any thinking that did not fit absolutely with the dominant thought was to be eradicated.... the spirit behind these purges is a reminder that we are not immune to the re-emergence of times when heroes and traitors proliferate' (p. 135).

It is this reminder that lingers. The closing chapter, an essay addressed directly to Mme Nomy, revisits the questions Ghoussoub has raised by reflecting on the possibilities for justice. In the end, Mme Nomy's lesson is transformed to a much more complex one, where vengeance and justice may be decoupled, but where there are no simple paths to reconciliation and coexistence. Ghoussoub leaves us with no answers, but with the sense that amnesia is not necessary to reconciliation, nor are revenge and retribution inevitable, and with the hope that a movement away from both vengeance and forgetting may lead to a grey space of reparation, of coexistence, and of new ways to be human.

Lara Deeb

doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400399

Muslim women activists in North America: speaking for ourselves

Katherine Bullock, editor; University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, USA, 2005, 237p, ISBN 0-292-70666-9, \$50 (Hbk), \$22.95 (Pbk)

Bullock states the aims of this (post-9/11) book as: to make non-Muslims aware of the amount of activism undertaken by Muslim women '...not in spite of their religion, but because of it' (p. ix); to counter negative stereotypes and provide