

FATIMA SADIQI, ed., *Women and Knowledge in the Mediterranean* (New York: Routledge, 2013). Pp. 255. \$145.00 cloth. ISBN 9781138108264.

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The articles in *Women and Knowledge in the Mediterranean*, edited by Fatima Sadiqi, convey the reality that there is no singular “womanhood,” nor a single conceptualization of “women’s knowledge” in the Mediterranean. A region as variegated as the Mediterranean basin presents women with many different means of accessing and sharing knowledge and this volume endeavors to capture this diversity. Highlighting the many ways through which women access and shape knowledge in the Mediterranean is the volume’s real strength.

The volume contends that women in the Mediterranean have participated in the production of “conventional” knowledge and have garnered gender-specific knowledge through their experiences as women. The editor states, “Mediterranean women’s knowledge-making forces a redifintion [*sic*] of the concept of knowledge” (2). While emphasizing that knowledge is relative and linked to a perspective shaped by gender, class, race, and education is not a new intervention, this volume highlights the continued exclusion of women’s knowledge from canonical definitions of “knowledge” in the Mediterranean and beyond.

The editor divides knowledge into four categories: written, oral, media, and “legal, religious, and economic knowledge.” Each category translates into one of the four discrete parts of the volume. “Part I: Women and Written Knowledge” comprises of five articles that stretch from the classical period into the present, with most of the content clustering in the contemporary era. The methodology of the articles in this multi-disciplinary edited volume, and in Part I in particular, is challenging to categorize; some articles draw upon original research and others take on a more historiographic or literary analysis approach.

The opening essay by Marjorie Lightman establishes the Mediterranean as a long-standing contact zone between Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic civilizations through its examination of the history of women's literary production in the Mediterranean. Paola Malpezzi's article focuses on Italian women's essays in favor of women's rights in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and is the only one in the volume centered in the "northern" Mediterranean. The final three essays in the first section focus on women's francophone literary production in contemporary Morocco, Lebanon, and Algeria. Writing in the language of a colonizer (in this case, French), is an interesting sub-theme that emerges in these essays. The French language serves as a bridge across the north-south axis of the Mediterranean; French enables dialogue between cultures (however, none of the essays explore questions of trans-Mediterranean readership and audience), while also restricting dialogue between francophone and Arabic-speaking women in the same country. The essays capture the long history that Mediterranean women have had with the written word.

While women have been producing written work in the Mediterranean region for centuries, the articles in "Part II: Women and Oral Knowledge," address the high levels of illiteracy among women in Morocco. Oral culture remains strong in Morocco. However, Sadiqi argues that in the last few decades orality in Morocco has become gendered and classed, it is the domain of the Berbers and *darija* speakers; but, orality has also been cast as positive because it distinguishes Moroccan culture from Western culture, which accords a women's tradition with greater cultural currency. Joseph Chetrit uses the experiences of Moroccan Jewish women in diaspora in the Americas to emphasize that orality is essential in every kind of knowledge, which counters long-standing knowledge hierarchies that prioritize written knowledge over oral knowledge.

"Part III: Women, Legal, Religious, and Economic Knowledge" captures how the Moroccan, Egyptian, and Israeli states operate in the daily lives of women and how this presence constricts – or expands – women's access to knowledge about their bodies and their secular and religious rights. The section may have been more aptly categorized as focusing on "civil knowledge." The article by Leila Hanafi and Christine Pratt contends that the 2004 amendments to the *Moudawana* (Moroccan family law) were novel in the Mediterranean region because they admitted equality in marriage in language grounded in an Islamic framework (unlike reforms in Turkey, which cast aside Islamic precedent) and the reforms were accomplished through decades of

women's activism (rather than being imposed from above as in Tunisia). Liat Kozma's article chronicles how Palestinian women in Israel are organizing to improve Palestinian women's access to justice in Israel. Kozma notes that "all the women interviewed were aware that knowledge alone is not sufficient for women's empowerment, but it is indispensable" (158). The two articles on women's access to legal knowledge align with the volume's contention that fields of knowledge—e.g. the juridical sphere—once monopolized by men are now being altered by the presence of women.

The affects of women's interpretations of religious knowledge on a once male-dominated sphere come through in Moha Ennaji's article about how *murshidat* (female preachers) were trained by the state in Morocco to combat "radicalism and highlight women's erudition and knowledge of Islam" (166). The author chronicles how the Egyptian government later adopted the model of empowering women to act as religious guides. The final essay in the section captures the different forces—state, church, patriarchy—that shape access to reproductive knowledge in the northern and southern parts of the Mediterranean. Rachel Newcomb calls for a fusion of "older," "traditional" means of controlling reproductive capacities and childbirth, and newer, "biomedical" knowledges about reproduction. Part III comes closest to addressing an element that is not highlighted as part of the editor's conceptualization of "knowledge"—education, which is key to accessing each of the forms of knowledge—written, oral, civil, media—that the volume highlights. Education is especially essential when it comes to accessing resources provided by the state.

Part IV, "Women and Media Knowledge," analyzes women's representation in the media as well as women's contribution to the media as bloggers. Mary Koutselini and Sofia Agathangelou's article examines Greek-Cypriot television shows and establishes that Cypriot "[w]omen never appear [on screen] having their own voice: they speak for men, about men, in relation to men" (201). The authors conclude that the television shows in the country simultaneously refract and shape the country's gender profile. Carmen Sammut's article does not focus on the content of the media in Malta, but rather on the media as a tool that could be utilized to change the station of women in the country. Marilyn Tadros explores both the media as a tool and the content created by female bloggers in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. Tadros notes that "[a]lthough blogging and microblogging are new technologies, they are really only extensions of older forms of communication [writing], and in essence an evolution of them" (247).

The volume's division of content into four discrete categories imposes boundaries between the many methods of women's knowledge production in the Mediterranean and curtails analysis into how certain technologies of knowledge production and dissemination like the written word have evolved—and how women's contributions to knowledge creation have likewise developed.

Sadiqi defines the Mediterranean as the “peoples of the two shores of the Mediterranean [who] not only belong to the same environment, but also share significant sociocultural traits such as the central place of the family in social organization, a rigid space-based patriarchy, a saliency of kinship, local cults of patron saints, and an honor-and-shame principle underlying sexuality and reputation” (1). In light of this definition it is not surprising that the majority of the articles focus on the southeastern (Lebanon, Israel and to a lesser extent, Egypt) and southwestern (Morocco) shores of the Mediterranean. It is mainly through the comparative structure the reader encounters women of the “northern” Mediterranean (Italy, Spain, Greece) in the past and the present. The island nations of the Mediterranean, Malta and Cyprus, are featured in articles about media production. France is referenced as a colonial actor, but French women's role in creating and disseminating knowledge is left unexplored. No articles reference Libya, the Balkans or Turkey, which also have shores that are lapped by the waters of the Mediterranean. One article stretches the “Mediterranean” to include Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

This volume's Braudelian conceptualization of the Mediterranean region raises the question of the utility of discussing the “Mediterranean” in a post-colonial era where nation-state borders interrupt the Mediterranean coastline. The definition of “Mediterranean” provided in the introduction emphasizes the geographic and cultural sameness of the region, but the articles in the volume go a long way in highlighting the region's differences. Scholars turning to this volume from Europe will find little coverage of women's access to knowledge along the northern coast of the sea. Scholars looking for a resource on how ideas and knowledge travel throughout the Mediterranean basin will not find much material relevant to their research.

The interdisciplinary depth and range of the articles presented in this volume make it an excellent primer for scholars in the fields of women and gender studies, religion, sociology, anthropology, history, comparative literature, and media studies looking for an introduction

to women's studies in the southern part of the Mediterranean region. The comprehensive bibliographies of the articles provide an excellent springboard for further research into the volume's interconnecting themes of "women," "knowledge," and the "Mediterranean."