Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and Discourses by Pinar Ilkkaracan
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attitudes, and briefly but usefully outlines the history of scientific evidence and understanding of the issue.

Nevertheless, there is, I feel, some hype in the book that is disturbing. The importance of disagreements within science seems exaggerated. Except for a tiny minority of skeptics and deniers, some of whom receive respectable references in the book, the overwhelming proportion of climate scientists agree on the basic findings and dangers; the disagreements about the technical details of the Greenland ice melt or the stability of the West Antarctica ice shelf are minor in comparison. Of course, there are great uncertainties about such things as tipping points. But the style of the book—controversies—seems to tempt him to exaggerate scientific disagreements. More important, in all the many areas he explores he finds the sources of disagreements to lie in culture and values; the role of interests is not interrogated. For example, there is no discussion of the very successful effort mounted by the big polluting industries of the United States—coal, oil, and automobiles—starting in the early 1990s to promote uncertainty and denial about the dangers of mounting greenhouse gases. To give just one example, the 4 percent difference between Democrats and Republicans in their concern about anthropogenic sources of warming had increase from 4 percent in 1997 to 34 percent by 2008; Republican concern steadily declined in response to the millions spent by the polluters to obfuscate the issue. This has little to do with culture and everything to do with the propaganda of big economic interests. It seems there is little room for power and interests in his postmodern reading of social science.

Nevertheless, I highly recommend this book not only as a primer on climate change, but, for its incisive exploration of some dense areas such as economic analysis, cultural clashes, and counterproductive and elitist political structures.


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The authors of this collection of essays include clinicians in psychology and psychotherapy, activists involved in women’s organizations, and researchers from places such as Lebanon, Turkey, the Israeli-occupied West Bank/East Jerusalem, and Pakistan (which is not in the “Middle East”), as well as the United States and Western Europe. The collection includes four essays that have been published elsewhere and one that is partly adapted from another publication. It is difficult to ascertain prominent themes across the essays. The authors rely on different evidence, analyzing interviews, individual case studies, print media, state policies and laws, Islamist accounts, activist campaigns, poetry and war songs, and didactic material. Class differences are generally unaddressed, and the impact of international political factors are not critically examined in a number of essays where such a discussion would have been useful. Given the extent to which many gender and sexuality “nongovernmental organization” activists are involved with United Nations, European Union, and other apparatuses of national or international governance, it is probably to be expected that relevant essays do not analyze the usually far-from-benign funding priorities of these entities. The essays are unfortunately uneven in their empirical and analytical contributions, although many are valuable in addressing issues that have not elicted significant scholarly attention.

In the only essay with a significant focus on homosexualities, Pinar Ilkkaracan uses a number of examples to provide a skillful overview of how recent campaigns to improve gender and sexual rights by feminists and other “modernizers” in the region continue to be caught up in historical and contemporary conflicts between Western colonialism and imperialism, the varying gender and sexuality agendas of powerful

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states (including the Vatican), the signifying projects of Eastern fundamentalisms, and the shifting priorities of postcolonial states. Sherifa Zuhur surveys criminal law in a number of countries and its relationships to tribal customs, European codes, and Islamic religious norms on issues of adultery, "honor" crime, rape, incest, sexual harassment, homosexuality, transsexuality, and abortion, among many other issues. Ilk- karacan analyzes debates in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century between feminists, Islamist activists, and Turkish state apparatuses over the Turkish feminists' campaign to improve some of the more egregious aspects of the Turkish Penal Code, so that it respects women's bodily integrity, ends the criminalization of consensual premarital sexual relations, and discontinues the criminalization of adultery. In her essay, Stefanie Eileen Nanes examines the 1999 emergence of a campaign to eliminate the leniency of Jordanian criminal law toward "honor" criminals and argues that it indicates an emerging civil society. In one of the most empirically and analytically rich essays in the collection, Azzah Baydoun addresses how public debates and polemics intersected with sectarian politics in mid-and late 1990s Lebanon to assure the failure of a proposed national sex education curriculum for middle school students developed with UN assistance and designed to prevent the transmission of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Hammed Shahidian provides a compelling comparison of sexual and marital self-help and other advice discourse offered by Islamist "sex experts," other authors informed by scientific discourse, and feminist therapists increasingly willing to openly address women's bodily desires in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Achim Rohde analyzes Ba'athist print media to demonstrate shifts in sexual, gender, and love mores in Iraq from the late-1960s to the 1990s, which he argues have been responsive to and can be explained by the larger agenda of the regime in different historical moments. Rubina Saigol examines the gender and sexual idioms of Pakistani nationalist and militarist thought, especially as captured in poetry and war songs. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian compellingly uses 22 case studies to examine contemporary attitudes toward rape and loss of virginity among Palestinians in the West Bank based on her clinical work with Palestinian girls and women who were raped, finding that the dominant cultural orientation blames the victim. The final chapter, by Leyla Gulcur and Ilkcaracan, focuses on Eastern European and Russian women entrepreneurs who regularly come to Turkey to purchase goods that can fit into a "suitcase" so they can sell them in their country of origin; they supplement this income generation with sex work in Turkey.

The collection provides a useful sense of contemporary policy and legal terrains, debates, and anxieties in the region in relation to different issues with respect to sex, sexuality, and women's and girls' status. Various articles would be useful in undergraduate courses on the sociology of gender and sexuality.


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Capital punishment is in a death spiral. It has largely been abolished throughout the Americas and Western Europe. It is still alive in Eastern Europe, Africa, the Muslim world, and throughout Asia. The next step in this death spiral, according to David Johnson and Franklin Zimring, will take place in East Asia. It is within the nations of East Asia that the majority of the unfinished business in the abolitionist movement is currently found, for East Asia is the reigning capital of capital punishment. The countries comprising East Asia account for 60 percent of the world’s population but 90 percent of the world’s executions. Yet, there is tremendous variation in both the prevalence and frequency of executions across East Asia. First, executions are rare throughout most of the retentionist countries in East Asia, a status referred to as "inertial retention," the