

Public Space, Environmental Violence and Female Vulnerability in Radwa Ashour's Specters and Betool Khadiri's Absent

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Abstract : This paper aims at examining the concepts of gender vulnerability, militarized spaces and environmental degradation in Egyptian novelist Radwa Ashour's Specters (1999) and Iraqi novelist Betool Khadiri's Absent (2005). Although the socio-economic, environmental and political conditions in the 1990s- Egypt and Iraq are different, this paper argues that Ashour's Specters and Khadiri's Absent show the two societies as sharing a concern with the politics of public participation, individual freedom and political violence. For example, while Specters exposes the planned processes of economic-political and cultural violence towards Egyptian environment and people that undermine concepts of justice, equality and democracy, Absent shows the destructive effects of the systematic, successive waves of (international) militarized interferences and socio-economic sanctions imposed on Iraq following the Gulf War that hinder efforts of social development and kindle ethnic-religious violence and polarization in the country. This paper investigates and relates issues of gender, environmental and political violence and repression in Ashour's Specters and Khadiri's Absent in relation to the concepts of public space and security in the two countries. The paper argues that the selected novels articulate a particular awareness of the political-international conflicts and difficulties in the 1990s-Egypt and Iraq, with the aim both to emphasize the issue of gender as a tool of oppression and power hierarchy worldwide and to figure out new notions of public participation and change.

Keywords : gender violence, public space, environment, change

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