Postscript

M. Susanne Schotanus

Like the introduction, this conclusion will come in a different shape than you're used to. Though in every conclusion there is the urge to tie everything together with a neat little bow, I am reminded here of the recent awareness in trauma and conflict studies that sometimes what is needed is to 'stay with the conflict' (see, e.g. Mayer, 2009). As the authors have shown time and again, all types of gender-based violence are embedded in a complex web of influences. Consequently, it won't be possible for one book to resolve all the factors that lead people to commit violence against others because of their gender identities and expectations. To realise the utopia that so many think we've already achieved – a world where violence is on the decline, where everyone has the freedom to develop their own identities and where people live in collective harmony – will require us to untangle these webs, make the taboo a topic of conversation and stay sensitive and respectful to cultural, subcultural and individual differences. Let's face it: that's quite a challenge.

Still, it's easy to become complacent. It is fantastic that we get to celebrate 'gay pride' and 'women's day'. It's amazing that we're at a point where the equal rights of women and people with LGBTQ+ identities are secured in so many countries' constitutions. These are no small victories. But what the three authors in this volume have shown is that even though laws can be changed in relatively short time spans, they do not automatically result in or even reflect cultural shifts. Constitutional protection is no guarantee of an absence of violence. Just because there might be laws against hate crimes and sexual assault does not mean that the legal system is designed to protect victim-survivors of these crimes. Even if sex work is seen by many as a necessary element for a healthy and harmonious society, as it is in Japan, people who engage in this work can still experience institutional discrimination and economic and symbolic violence. And though patriarchal societies have been shown to assign men certain privileges that are denied women, the associated gender norms can be as violent and damaging to men's mental well-being as they are to those of people of other genders.

Instances of gender-based violence take place every day. And though the concrete milestones that we get to celebrate might be important steps forwards, they are only steps on the very long road to the utopia I described previously. We need to keep reaching for these milestones. But

simultaneously it is necessary to look at these issues in the larger web they're embedded in. It's necessary to start untangling the plethora of factors that have contributed to environments in which the types of gendered violence can multiply, mutate and find new hosts and targets.

It is with this aim in mind that the chapters in this book have explored those types of gender-based violence that are often excluded from the conversation. This book, therefore, combines often-silenced narratives into a nuanced snapshot of violence itself. Though the use of the term 'snapshot' might seem odd here, especially considering the historical narratives presented in some of the chapters, it's rather deliberate. As I said: types of violence can mutate, they change. In the words of Judith Butler: violence 'renews itself in directions that exceed both deliberate intention and instrumental schemes' (Butler, 2020, p. 23). And as violence changes, so do our understandings of the concept of violence itself. In this book, violence has been shown to be dynamic and adaptable. It has the uncanny ability to identify cracks in the systems we've thrown up to keep it out and worm its way through – weakening the systems themselves. Whenever a new communication medium pops up, ways are found to enact violence through it. Violence is changeable, and if we actually want a violence-free society, we need to change our understanding of it as soon as it changes its face. This requires vigilance, study and publications such as these: books that identify the different ways in which violence takes place in our societies and the factors that contribute to its prevalence and specific natures. We need to look for violence beyond the obvious places. To properly understand it, we need to study it in its diversity – by studying it within the different (national) contexts it exists in and in all the different shapes it can take.

Though the authors have made a fantastic start with this project, by bringing cases from India, Japan and South Africa to the attention of the international research community; by bridging disciplinary boundaries and by expanding the definition of gender based violence as its often researched – there is only so much that can be done in any one book. In the introduction I briefly touched on the limited definition of gender that has been employed in this book. In future studies I hope this gap can be redressed, by doing for *gendered* violence what this book has aimed to do for gendered *violence*. The geographical scope of this book comes with similar caveats: in our desire to produce a comparative, cohesive work on the different forms gendered violence can assume in different parts of the world – in addition to the obvious focus on only three of the world's countries – most cases analysed have also focused on experiences from only the largest urban centres of each country. In future studies the scope can be broadened by not only actively seeking contributions on countries that are largely absent from the international interdisciplinary debates but also by paying attention to similarities and differences between urban, suburban, rural and other geographical contexts. By expanding the conversation of gendered violence, through new

interdisciplinary work, it is my hope that we might come to a better understanding of the project ahead, to address the issues on all relevant levels and in all relevant arenas and, consequently, to make the world a safe place where people of all genders can express themselves authentically without fear of violent retribution.

References

Butler, J. (2020). *The force of non-violence: An ethico-political bind.* London: Verso.
Mayer, B. S. (2009). *Staying with conflict: A strategic approach to ongoing disputes.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.