‘rehabilitating’ oneself in the ‘eyes of the masses’ which has throttled radical intellectuals and caused initiatives to halt the march of fundamentalism to dry out” (p. 137). Muslim feminists, she continues, “privelege the voice of religion and celebrate ‘Islamic feminism’ thus [highlighting] only one of the many forms of identity available to Middle Eastern women, obscuring ways that identity is asserted or reclaimed, overshadowing forms of struggle outside religious practices and silencing the secular voices which are still raised against the region’s stifling Islamification policies” (pp. 137-138). She speaks with particular bitterness of those Muslim women scholars who, living in the safety of the West, and protected by its liberal society, still identify themselves with Islam. These women, she says, “exoticize difference, turning grim political reality at home into what seems a merely playful intellectual exercise” (p. 139).

While there may be elements of truth in her accusations, certainly as applied to some writers, it seems to me that she misses a dramatically important point. She herself privileges fundamentalist Islam over the practice of their religion by millions, nay, hundreds of millions of Muslim women who live and work like women anywhere else in the modern world. And even more importantly, her accusations against fundamentalist regimes – justified though they may be – blind her to the fact that these regimes are in their very nature oppressive, not just to women, but to all who challenge their authority and its philosophical basis, including in many cases radical fundamentalist groups. This is the real problem with Moghissi’s book, which otherwise makes some interesting points and valid criticisms.

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**REVIEWED BY NADIA EL CHEIKH**

Anyone engaged in the study of Islamic and Middle Eastern women’s history will be familiar with the vast output of Nikki Keddie in this field. Her contributions have been seminal in propelling the investigation of women and gender relations in a variety of historical contexts. This book includes both new and old material, brought together by the author’s formidable goal of providing a general synthesis of the state of the field at this moment. Relying on the rapidly evolving expansion of research and scholarly output, it covers the period from pre-Islam until the present. The volume is in three parts. The first and lengthiest is a history of Middle Eastern women from pre-Islam until modern times. The second part includes published articles that cover broad ideas and issues. The third part is a short autobiographical section where Keddie reflects on her own development and evolving attitudes towards the field of women’s studies. The volume also contains reproductions of photographs that the author took in the Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s.

In Book One, comprising a book-length history of Middle-Eastern women, the chapter divisions are chronological. The first part deals with the period from pre-Islamic until late Mamluk times. The first chapter focuses on pre-Islamic gender societies in the Mediterranean and Arabian regions, and the rise of Islam and its effect on the gender system with a particular discussion of the relevant Qur’anic verses. The second chapter covers, in 20 pages, the periods of the Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid caliphas and synthesizes information on Islamic family law, e.g. on marriage, divorce, adultery, and child custody as well as on class and slavery. Keddie also provides information about women’s lives from the Cairo Geniza documents.

This huge effort at synthesis and condensation results in the lumping of information from various periods into a seemingly undistinguishable set of historical circumstances. One example is the very
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title of the section on “women’s lives and codes of honor over the centuries” (pp. 38-40). Relying on recent anthropological studies, this section discusses the notions of shame, modesty, and family honor, without any tangible historical grounding. The specific location of this section implies that its general comments are supposed to be valid for the much earlier periods. While the author rightly points out that the scarce and controversial nature of the documentation concerning women in this very long period means that a lot of what is written about it is speculative (p. 9), this does not mean that “medieval Islam,” stretching over a thousand years, should be treated in an almost monolithic fashion, especially since the author herself refers to the problem of reading later beliefs and practices into earlier events (p. 11).

Of course, part of the problem is the near absence of incisive new methodological and epistemological approaches to women and gender history for the early Islamic period. This is to be contrasted with the substantial advances made in the fields of Ottoman and modern Middle Eastern history. The respective states of the fields are reflected in Keddie’s synthesis which gives the most emphasis and space to the modern period. The available documentation, notably the legal documents for the Ottoman empire, “the wealth and reliability of this documentation, the amount of monographic scholarship available and the proliferation of Arab countries with distinct policies and histories regarding women led me to give more space to recent events than to earlier ones” (p. 10).

The fifth chapter covers the period 1914-45 and includes coverage of women in most of the Middle Eastern countries that have come into existence since 1945. The author highlights this contribution to be a special feature of the volume (p. 2) since most of these countries have not been the subject of individual narrative historical books or articles. However, the treatments are unequal. Taking the example of Lebanon for instance, the comments on legal and societal changes affecting women since 1945 are very limited (pp. 139-140). There is no mention of important advances in the law pioneered by the late Laure Moghaizel, and no reference to the more recent changes in the sexual landscape reflected in the publication of Barra, the first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexed, and queer magazine in the Arab world. It might have been better if this chapter had been written as a bibliographical essay, highlighting further possibilities of research in certain specific areas.

Book Two includes several published essays that elucidate the current state of writing on Middle Eastern women, analyzing what has been accomplished and suggesting what is needed to further study in this field. The oldest of these articles, “Problems in the Study of Middle Eastern Women,” was a pivotal contribution at the time of its publication in 1979, and in many ways, remains an important article for the insights it brings to the study of Middle Eastern women, especially for the earlier periods. Another reprinted article, “Scholarship, Relativism, and Universalism,” discusses the problem of attitudes towards the position of Muslim women, be they hostile or apologetic. It suggests that there may be a dialectical way of contextualizing historically evolved features now considered positive or negative. Another useful article included in this section is one that surveys recent books on modern Middle Eastern women’s history, and in which the author highlights the geographical concentration of this scholarship on Egypt and Iran.

Book Three features autobiographical recollections that tell of the author’s changing attitudes with respect to women’s studies. As such it constitutes a valuable reflection on the development of the field in the last decades.

Undoubtedly, the task of synthesizing the enormous volume of information and material available is daunting. The author has tried to incorporate well-documented conclusions on a whole range of subjects, including analyses of views regarding women in the early Islamic period, assessment of the role of Turks and Mongols, analyses of Ottoman court records, studies on women’s rights movements, and other areas of inquiries. As the author states, this is a general work aimed largely at non-specialists. It could most usefully be used as a quick reference guide that can direct readers

There is a great dearth of studies on masculinities in the Islamic and Arab world, and emerging literature on 'subaltern' masculinities (in this region at least) comes mostly in the form of collected essays as opposed to single-author, depth-of-field treatises. But even as it grows, this young field seems to avoid building up a canon, and this is by no means a criticism. Practitioners in this field, as in this particular collection of essays, have opted for multiplicity in form as well as content rather than any unitary voice.

This valuable addition to the expanding body of literature in men's studies introduces multiple readings of the experiences of men (and women) in the Muslim World, without the hubris of offering up any explanations of what it means to be a Muslim man. The editor, Lahoucine Ouzgane, who is associate professor of English and film studies at the University of Alberta, intended the book to look critically at patriarchy and structures of self-proclaimed association to Islam. Based on social constructivism, this collection of essays is premised on the principle that individuals and groups participate in the making of gender realities, in this case masculinity in the context of nations where Islam prevails. The term 'Islamic' in the title, as differentiated from 'Islam', points to a distinction between notions of manliness in Muslim religious practices and codes, and social constructs of masculinity that emerge within Muslim society: two things that are all too often conflated. The 12 essays gathered here under relatively loose bearings, avoid slapping 'Islam' in any single-stroke onto the manifestations they address. They lean rather toward de-naturalizing the deep-seated relationship between Islam and patriarchy, and bringing to light its diversity and contradictions, which Ouzgane claims "lie at the heart of the ongoing crisis of Arab and Muslim society, thought and politics" (p. 6). Islamic Masculinities is at its best with articles that avoid facile or frequent reference to 'masculinity' or 'Islamic' which falsely suggests that these terms are coagulated enough to serve as stable stepping stones on any thought terrain. A good example is Celia Rotherberg's article, "My Wife is from the Jinn: Palestinian Men, Diaspora and Love," where she tackles some themes that dissect the social articulation of 'masculinity' in the West Bank: love-desire, diaspora, (otherness/otherworldliness), proximity-distance.

Looking at a popular magazine serial called "My Wife is from the Jinn" as an entry point to the mostly unspoken experiences and attitudes of men in a West Bank village, Rotherberg culls shared cultural meaning on gender and masculinity there. This essay tells of how popular phantasmagorical tales with direct and metaphoric references to social pressure (from internal and external forces, including foreign occupation, marriage norms, material constraints, etc.) act upon and reflect the social imaginary, reproducing and maintaining gender boundaries. While buttressing patriarchal structures, the fictiveness of these stories opens up a much-needed valve to release the pressure on men and women alike. The thematic axes Rotherberg builds her treatise upon allow her to discuss community belonging without ever mentioning 'masculinity', 'Islamic', or men's (or women's) ideal attributes or (un)acceptable behavior, a trap Banu Helvacioglu falls into after a promising start to her essay, "The smile of death and the solemncholy of masculinity."

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