

# **Journal of Political Ecology**

## **Reviews**

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**Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East by edited by Lila Abu-Lughod. Princeton: Princeton University Press (1998), ix, 300 pp.**

**Review Essay by Fadwa El Guindi, University of Southern California.**

At the onset, the visual imagery on the book's cover (a caricatured drawing of two Egyptian women, one baladi and one afrangi), taken from the Egyptian magazine Al-Ithnayn published in 1934, speaks volumes but not to the volume at hand. The title to the magazine illustration is Beauty of Today and Beauty of the Past. Without analytic commentary justifying the adoption of this image, the irony in the message of the picture's title and the juxtaposition of local imageries in the picture is lost. Keeping the 1934 reading of the image, "past versus present beauty," without analyzing its intersection with Egyptian cultural notions of baladi versus afrangi women (on this see Early 1993) is a missed opportunity to seek insights through visual and ethnographic analysis. The reader now sees only an exotic image used to sell another book on Middle East women. There is clearly a deluge of publications on Middle East women claiming a "feminist" genre many put together in haste, often using non-analytic, discourse-focused polemics, and a Women's Studies' eclectic orientation - a common genre that tends to ignore disciplinary canons of inquiry and violate both people's culture and disciplinary method.

In her Introduction (pp. 3 - 31), Abu-Lughod presents "three issues" addressed by the book: "First is the way that in the postcolonial world women have become potent symbols of identity and visions of society and the nation." (p. 3). "Second is the way that women themselves actively participate in these debates and social struggles, with feminism an inescapable term of reference" (p. 3). "Third are the complex ways that the West embraced, repudiated, and translated, are implicated in contemporary gender politics" (p. 3). Earlier in the Preface (pp. vii - ix) the Editor had mentioned certain other features (which is confusing) that are viewed as shared by the contributing authors of the collection. Four are mentioned: 1) questioning the dichotomy tradition/modernity and its assumed association with domestic/public roles respectively, 2) questioning the equating of modernity with progress, emancipation and empowerment of women, 3) "taking seriously" the relationship of Europe to Middle Eastern projects of remaking women, 4) using a broad definition of feminism - one that is not confined to women's movements and liberation from patriarchy - that includes the wide range of projects having women as their objects,

## Reviews

such as state building, anti-colonial nationalism, changing social orders, and the emergence of new classes.

There is nothing groundbreaking or conceptually new in these formulations. Some can even be read as naïve in light of the available knowledge and scholarship in anthropology. At first one wonders whether we need another work to rehash old discussions. Is there still a question about domestic/public roles being linked to tradition/modernity? Has not the assumption of women's emancipation been delinked from modernization? Has not the ethnocentric feminism fragmented into culture-based feminisms? Is it new thinking to recognize the influence of colonial encounter? Was this process of incorporating elements in contact situation not studied as syncretism in anthropology for many decades?

Disappointingly, Abu-Lughod seems to think that a reconceptualization will occur if one only offers a different word to the subject. A good example is in this quote from the Introduction: "hybridization and translation seem especially appropriate where the term "postcolonial" might seem confusing" (p. 18). There is an illusion here that by introducing new or current terms to substitute for existing ones then magically (perhaps philosophically) this new word will shed light on the phenomenon addressed, not by systematic data, theoretical analysis, or cultural contextualization. Inevitably we are led from reification of terms to pigeonholing: "notions of the postcolonial might seem more appropriate to places like India, the Caribbean, or Algeria. The history of the Middle East is far more messy" (p. 18). Are we ranking histories on a scale of messiness? Is Algeria not part of the Middle East? Nor is the notion of hybridization a postmodern term. It can be traced back at least to the 1950s in American anthropology (see Barnett 1953:188, 224 and more generally, pp. 181-224). It was then seriously, not polemically, integrated as part of the development of a conceptual framework for studying culture change.

There is one postulation among the issues raised that is mentioned in both Preface and Introduction. It is "the vexed question of the relationship of Europe to Middle Eastern projects of remaking women" (p. vi). Phrased differently: "How are we to think about those discourses that borrowed from Europe, were supported by Europeans, or were shaped in response to colonial definitions of the "backwardness" of the East?" (p. 6). Indeed how?

It ought to be noted that the Preface and the Introduction do not simply summarize contributions in the volume or determine their shared features. They are in large part a framing for an orientation, a perspective, an ideological stance on scholarship, even when in some instances the evidence discovered, as in Fahmy's archival-based study, contradicts it. The book seeks to address what is considered a paradox: that calls for remaking women at the turn of the century advocated more public participation and more rigid domesticity (p. 8, emphasis added). Further, Abu-Lughod sees as confusing "the way Muslim thinkers (from South Asia) can both be working within Muslim tradition and yet be shaped by the colonial encounter" (p. 19). It must be noted that these latter remarks are made by an advocate against a tradition / modernity dichotomy (p. vii, 13,14,15, etc.). Perhaps what appears to be contradictory is ultimately a function of the gaze implicitly constructed out of the frame of reference.

There are two aspects of the editorial framing of this body of works that merit scrutiny. First, the notion of culture is described in terms such as "rigid" (p. 16), "ossified" (p. 17), and having an "emperial genealogy" (p. 14). This is a stance that confuses culture politics of manipulation and control with a people's woven shared conceptualization that shapes their identity and historical uniqueness. It is not necessary to throw out culture when we choose to focus on culture politics, or then we throw out the baby with the bath water. The cultural factor would enhance analyses of culture politics.

Second, there is a particular angle it advocates when "taking seriously the relationship to Europe of the Middle East project of remaking women." Previous works on turn-of-century feminism in the Middle East are considered to have postulated that by adopting European feminism men and women accepted colonial domination and their own subordination. An alternative understanding is proposed in this volume, which calls for "interrogating the complex ways in which European colonial power was fundamental to the historical development of the

## Reviews

Middle East" (p. xvi) instead of the postcolonial approach that attributes low status of colonized women to missionaries and colonial officials (p. 14). "We must tell the story of colonialism in cultural terms" (p. 17). Here, in contradiction with the overall posture, culture is admitted.

Consistently, the notion "appropriation," commonly used in hegemonic contexts, is employed here in reverse. The colonized are seen as appropriating European culture, which becomes a stimulus to a new modernity. This of course neutralizes the element of power asymmetry inherent in colonial encounter and glosses over specific and complex exploitative conditions under which projects are forced upon a culture. The reader is told that "wherever Christian missionaries and European colonists set down marks were left on gender ideals and possibilities" (4), that there is value in emulating the West (p.19). Obscure wording aside, this reads as a hegemonic framework to the study of feminism.

Ziauddin Sardar explicitly critiques these hegemonic orientations. He writes (1999:1; also see Sardar 1998): "colonialism has already drained much of the wealth of the 'Third World,' (and now) postmodernism appropriates the last resources its traditions, spiritualities, cultural property, ideas and notions the new imperialism." The phrase "word imperialism" comes to mind, invoking Barnett's work on innovation in the 1950s, as we examine the framing vocabulary and terminology. For example, the notion "born-again" (p. 253) is employed in reference to Islamic movements, privileging a Christian frame of reference for an Islamic phenomenon. Projecting familiar ideas or constructs on the phenomenon of study is ethnocentric. The phrase "modernizing women" (p. 8) or remaking them, as in the title of the book, validate a colonial vocabulary of dominance.

Choosing to refer to Middle East women's cultural solidarities of private women's worlds and bonding as "homosocial networks" (p.12), evokes familiar contemporary vocabulary about same sex alliances carrying connotations beyond the literal technical meaning of the term, ironically invoking Orientalist fantasies we were warned about by Edward Said's classic critique.

Jane Collier is quoted (p.28) but the message in her comment is not heeded. She is quoted as having written that images of "enslaved," veiled Muslim women, who could not marry for love or develop intimate relations with husbands "must have played a crucial role in constructing images of Western women as consenting to their disempowerment (and) helped reconcile Western men to marriages that were difficult to distinguish from prostitution as the devaluation of women's work left women only 'love' to offer in return for the money they and their children needed to survive" (see Collier 1995: 162). Collier adds another dimension in the colonial encounter. But there is also the reality of colonial appropriation of ideas, models and constructs from the subjugated societies. If we are to examine complexity in the process, all these aspects in colonial encounter, including power asymmetry must be addressed.

In general, the book consists of works (except for one article) dealing with discourse on women providing 'evidence' of influence from European discourse on gender and debates about the value of emulating the West. A genealogy of scholarship is mentioned that includes, in particular, Timothy Mitchell, Denise Kandiyoti, Leila Ahmed, Margot Badran, Beth Baron and Parvin Paidar, who crystallized questions of feminist interest, such as the politics of modernity, the politics of East / West relations, and class. Overall, this volume is reactive to claims made in the above-mentioned scholarship. It is to be noted that discourse scholarship tends to examine text (without context) and words (without ethnography) - a trend that is going out of vogue in anthropology but seems to continue in full gear in women's studies. It over-expresses its claims and undersupports by evidence.

Analysis needs to go beyond text and local voices. While necessary ingredients, these are not sufficient. Theoretical conceptualization, not mere term assignments, refines studies and increases understanding. One needs to go beyond recording local voices, assuming it "sufficient to produce meaning. It is not" (El Guindi 1999b: 67). Conclusions presented on that basis are dubious, as for example the claim that women's veiling is a response to pitting Islamic culture against Western culture (p. 15). Another is that "political defeats like the 1967 war with Israel" are explained as

## Reviews

caused by “straying from the Islamic path” (pp. 14-15). Local expressions, ideologizations and rationalizations seeking answers to lived experiences and political crises are left at that. No theoretical analysis is provided. Abu-Lughod’s call against culture and generalization was compellingly critiqued in the recently published *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (Schweizer 1998:60). Anthropologists object to orientations that deny individuality of people and particularity of cultures. Stripped of identity, people become homogenized and globalized actors in a large machine of economy and postmodernity.

*Remaking Women* is divided into seven chapters grouped into three parts. Part One (pp. 33-87) is titled “Rewriting Feminist Beginnings: The Nineteenth Century.” It has two chapters. Chapter 1 (pp. 35-72) by Khaled Fahmy (History), has the title “Women, Medicine, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” and Chapter 2 (pp.73-87) by Mervat Hatem (Political Science) is called “Aisha Taymur’s Tears and the Critique of the Modernist and the Feminist Discourses on Nineteenth-Century Egypt.” Part Two: “Mothers, Wives, and Citizens: The Turn of the Century” (pp. 89-211) consists of three chapters. Chapter 3 (pp. 91-125) by Afsaneh Najmabadi (Women’s Studies) is called “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran.” Chapter 4 (pp.126-170) by Omnia Shakry (History) is titled “Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt,” and Chapter 5 (pp. 171-211) by Marilyn Booth (author and translator) is called “The Egyptian Lives of Jeanne d’Arc.” Part Three (pp. 213 - 269) is titled “Islamism, Modernism, and Feminisms: The Late Twentieth Century.” It has two chapters. Chapter 6 (pp. 215-242) by Zohreh T. Sullivan (English) is titled “Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran.” Chapter 7 by Lila Abu-Lughod (Women’s Studies & Anthropology) is titled “The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics.” The volume concludes with an Afterword (pp. 270 - 287) by Deniz Kandiyoti (Women’s Studies) titled “Some Awkward Questions on Women and Modernity in Turkey.”

Some volume contributors are scrutinizing the Egyptian feminist writer Qasim Amin, who was presumed to have been calling for “retraditionalization” of womanhood in the guise of modernization. In a recent article (1999a) I argue that in fact what Qasim Amin was proposing was quite different. He was proposing a European model of womanhood and domesticity, not a return to Egyptian traditional womanhood, a direction which when examined carefully in the context of Egyptian society seems to diminish women’s status rather than enhance it and reduce women’s rights. The term “retraditionalization” is not appropriate. Colonial intrusions through local interlocutors of Europeanization finds many examples, as we shall see when I discuss Chapter 1 by Fahmy below.

The Introduction (“Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions,” pp. 3 - 31) begins with three “stories” (referred to as phenomena), from Turkey, Iran and Egypt, immediately reducing the broadly stated goals to women’s veiling. The story on Egypt refers to a woman television broadcaster who wrote a book on her journey from sufur to hijab. Abu-Lughod translates the title of her book as “from Unveiling to Veiling” (p. 3, emphasis added) thus distorting the cultural nuances of the original Arabic conceptualization.

The countries of these stories are the purported representatives of the volume’s Middle East. But the book deals “most in fact with Egypt” (p. 4). Of the 234 chapter pages, 164 are about Egypt, 70 on Iran. Turkey is not covered in any of the chapters but is the basis of observations in the Afterword (pp. 270-287). To justify the narrowness of cultural geography, Abu-Lughod states that “the Middle East is too broad” (p. viii) and one “cannot include all the countries on the issues we consider” (p. viii). To readers seeking books to use in Middle East classes then, the volume’s subtitle (*Feminism and Modernity in The Middle East*) is grossly misleading.

Abu-Lughod examines the works and studies on Islamic veiling and suggests that the phenomenon does not represent a return to traditional practices, but rather is an example of an alternative modernity. Was this not already argued and demonstrated in the 1980s? Among other works my own publications on the subject already established this point on the basis of field data (see El Guindi 1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1995 and most

## Reviews

recently in my article (1999a), and book *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, 1999b).

So if this body of works has no new conceptualization or novel postulations, why should anyone read it or take it seriously? I propose a few reasons for its use most appropriately in classes of Culture Studies and Women's Studies: First, it further demonstrates the flaws within the non-disciplinary 'women's studies' approach to the study of feminism and the problems inherent in orientations that avoid systematic data and analysis. Perhaps it will stimulate more carefully conceptualized, systematically researched studies, or a total reconsideration of the value in keeping Women's Studies in academic setting. After all, it has accomplished the goals it has set out to do since the 1970s, bringing about awareness and stimulating research on women. It is time to move on.

Second, individual contributions in this volume that both challenge and expand on claims proposed in scholarship of feminism and modernity actually provide new detailed and interesting descriptions, two of which (Fahmy and Booth) challenge the editorial framing of this volume.

In Chapter 1, Fahmy has an excellent, clearly written, thoroughly researched piece. Its approach is not discoursist and its subject is not women's writing (the only chapter in the volume that is not). It is rich in primary data from archival sources in Egypt, by research done over a period of two years in the National Archives of Egypt. The research covers the medical institutions introduced into Egypt as part of reform by Muhammad Ali Pasha in the nineteenth century. In 1832, Dr. Antoine-Barthélemy Clot, a French doctor from Marseilles who was called to Cairo by Muhammad Ali Pasha for the purpose of organizing Egypt's medical system, opened a new school for women to practice medicine. The chapter chronicles archival case after case in meticulous detail about the developmental history and the related dynamics with regard to the establishment of this School of Midwives, a term used by La Verne Kuhnke, the historian of the subject, and used by Fahmy (p. 35).

Keeping the term 'midwife' in English is misleading for the non-Arabic speakers. It is reductionist to describe, as Abu-Lughod does (p. 10) Fahmy's study as showing the "ambivalence toward these women doctors (and how) they were treated as second class vis-à-vis male doctors." This observation assumes that hakima is equivalent to female doctor, which might account but not excuse the knee-jerk jump into patriarchy arguments. The true find in Fahmy's study lies in his well-documented demonstration of how the establishment of this school, and hence this new gendered medical practitioner, was an imposition on the local cultural and social system used to disrupt cultural understandings and violate established social relations, religious beliefs and professional hierarchies. The empirically-based insights deriving from the resistance (or sites of contestation (p. 37)) manifested in some segments of society reported by Fahmy are lost on Abu-Lughod.

The Arabic word for this new medical practitioner is hakima. The traditional midwife in Egypt is known as daya in Arabic. I add that the term employed for women and men doctors with degrees from the College of Medicine is tabib (male)/ tabiba (female). To shed light on the data presented, I recall the cultural value attached to these professions. Hakim/ hakima (male and female, although when first introduced it was only female, it seems), when put on the scale of professionalism (and prestige) in the medical profession, has a higher place than traditional midwife (daya) but is considered lower than physician (tabib or tabiba), male or female. I also bring into this discussion the other class of practitioners known as mumarrid / mumarrida, Arabic for nurse. Perhaps a study of root beginnings for all these medical professions and their related Arabic vocabulary would be most relevant to this study. When, at some point, tamrid (nursing) entered (though it is still not taken seriously) it was located above daya (traditional midwife) but below hakima on that scale. It, as in the case of the secretary, used to be predominantly a male occupation in Egypt, due to its being culturally viewed as too subordinating for women to occupy it. Awareness of this cultural knowledge might have deterred Abu-Lughod's rush to the patriarchal argument for answers.

According to Fahmy's research, the new school of hakimas provided a different kind of

## Reviews

training for a new practice, clearly distinguished from the situation of midwife in which there had been no formal training. I add that it was not intended to produce female physicians either. In fact, as Fahmy tell us, these women were trained in midwifery and obstetrics, with some instruction in basic knowledge of modern medicine (p. 36). This development produced a familiar response among European travelers to Egypt. It was considered a pioneering project and a cause of amazement “not to find Egyptian women locked up in their harems but working in modern health establishments” (p. 36, emphasis added).

Fahmy challenges modernist and feminist assumptions of such reform. He refutes, using compelling evidence, the postulation that “modern” institutions offer new opportunities and new emancipations. These “experiments” of the pasha, Fahmy argues, should be situated in his larger military career and the relationship of the French designed medical reform that supplanted traditional forms to the main project of creating a conscription-based army. In case after case, his study challenges the view that the introduction of a school of Hakimas was a source of liberation and empowerment for women. In archival materials he sought to examine the nature, purpose, and impact on the participating students of establishing the school and training women in this new profession.

“It is obvious,” writes Fahmy, “that (what) prompted the authorities to found a medical school for women (was not for enlightenment or modern education for women) rather, it was the need to preserve the health of the soldiers in the army” (p. 46). It was believed that their health was threatened by syphilis and their life by superstitious dayas. The authorities needed to control the dayas, which the authorities considered to be a “leakage in the system” (p. 51). Dayas were too autonomous and independent. More importantly, the administration needed vital information about the people that dayas freely dealt with.

Therefore, the duties of the trained hakimas included overseeing and policing, and reporting on the activities of midwives. Coercive measures were enforced on the hakimas (including who to marry) who in turn were made to coerce dayas (pp. 50-52), the traditional non-formally trained professionals who were too free for the controlling administration. The population reacted. People experienced authorized interference in their daily lives in unprecedented ways, controlling and manipulating their bodies and violating social norms and culture in ways they had never seen before. In the end the women of the new education were merely pegs in a large scheme of new forms of centralized tight control in a hierarchy of power with Europeans (particularly French) at the helm and traditional forms at the bottom. This find, backed by systematic data, contradicts the postulations in the Preface and Introduction. We need not resort to “authenticity” arguments to discuss culturally produced forms versus colonially induced projects. We need good data and Fahmy provides them.

In Chapter 2, Mervat Hatem’s piece is about ‘Aisha Taymur, who emerged as “one of the leading women poets of nineteenth-century Egypt” (p.73). She critiques “the feminist and the modernist discourse that represented Taymur as an exemplar of the progressive character of the new society and its gender roles” (p.85). Based on her examination of written accounts about Taymur, rather than primary materials, Hatem argues that the feminist/modernist approach exaggerated the supportive role of Taymur’s father, who encouraged her literary education, and was silent or unsympathetic of her mother’s role in stressing domestic socialization, her daughter who took on the domestic obligations as her mother pursued her career, and the female tutors who educated her.

On the basis of Hatem’s judgment of valuation and devaluation, she makes a distinction between masculine and feminine readings and describes how Taymur herself had adopted the masculine vision in the first stage of her life, but after the death at eighteen of the daughter whose health had been deteriorating but went unnoticed, she was confronted as she went into seclusion with the issue of reconciliation between career ambitions and wifely-motherly obligations. She blamed herself and her career for the death of the daughter she intensely loved but neglected.

The importance of this chapter lies in the nuanced descriptions of realities of Taymur’s life and choices, not her broad strokes (indeed not in the formulaic jargon). Some observations are

## Reviews

symptomatic of faults in this general approach to the non-empirical study of feminism. When she writes: “[O]ne should not discount the effort by ... (her) mother, who was a former slave, to shield her daughter from social censure” (p. 80). This is a loaded comment. What evidence are we presented with that her mother was pulling her to domesticity to shield her from social censure? What evidence of a connection between her “slave” background and her approach to raising her daughter? Hatem loads the interpretation with uninformed, unsubstantiated presumptions.

The reader had been told that Taymur was born into the affluent aristocratic class, to a father of Turkish Kurdish roots and a mother who was a freed Circassian slave (p.75), using women’s writings on Taymur as the source. When the term slave is used without historicity or explanation, it inevitably invokes ingrained understandings deriving out of the more familiar knowledge about slavery in Europe and America (by whites of blacks from Africa). Perhaps the term slavery itself should be refined. Missing is information on the Ottoman notion (itself rooted in Byzantine empirical structures) of bringing into the empire or admitting central Asian, European and Arab women (and men) from central Asia and Arab regions to serve the Ottoman administration. This imported labor could and did move up the ladder to become woman sultans, men wazirs and heads of armies. Without explication or historicity, the critique of the masculine feminism becomes an apologia for feminine feminism.

The next two chapters, 3 and 4, one on Iran by Afsaneh Najmabadi and the other on Egypt by Omnia Shakry deal with the concepts of woman as wife, housewife, and mother in nineteenth and twentieth century texts. According to Najmabadi, recent writings on women of that period do not adequately deal with what she sees as significant shifts in notions of motherhood and wifehood (p.91). She examines Farsi texts and remarks that the shift was “from a premodern to modern” notions of womanhood, using as evidence the terms used in the two phases. The reference to the woman changed from “house” to “manager of the house.” Without empirical content, relying only on the author’s interpretation of text out of context, it is hard to assess the significance of this observation. Some observations are from texts, of texts, of translations, of original texts many generations of interpretations apart from the original material. For example, Najmabadi locates a “pattern of moral constructions” (p. 98) in an 1876 book that is a Farsi translation from Arabic of an originally French text. She sees the change in reference from house to manager of the house as representing a “crafting of a new kind of mother and of a new kind of wife.” She also finds that the new notion was tied to national progress which depended on the education of women. During the period when these arguments were made, the first decade of the twentieth century, new schools for girls were being established (pp. 106-107). In the 1920s a new genre of writing emerged focusing on etiquette and manners. Najmabadi saw that these shifts and developments entail both disciplinary and emancipatory dimensions. Overall, the article rambles on, is confusing to read, and conceptualization is weak. It is hard to understand where a segment leads, as discussion keeps moving around eluding a pattern or a theme. The summary of the texts selected is interesting and could lead to fresh insights. It is difficult to locate their value in the way they are presented in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, Omnia Shakry explores connections between European colonial and indigenous modernizing and nationalist discourses in turn-of-century Egypt. She follows the debates on motherhood and child rearing in literary and religious journals in Egypt to examine the changing conception of the mother and mothering. The study finds striking conjunctures between colonial and nationalist discourse on women such that Egyptian discussions of motherhood need to be situated within the context of both colonial and anticolonial discourses. She argues that anticolonial discourse, particularly the discourse of tarbiya, has its indigenous component based on local understandings, and is not merely borrowed from European ones (pp. 126-127).

She observes that the colonial project engaged in the production of knowledge intended to reconstruct the domain of women. Shakry’s chapter has an important methodological advantage missing in the other contributions of the same genre in this collection, namely comparing

## Reviews

"discourse on mothering in both the metropole and the colony" (p. 133). During the 18th and 19th centuries a Britishness was superimposed on diverse cultures and a new identity of empire was being forged. This included a redefinition of women's roles and mothering. The British discourse during the first decade of the 1900s reveals a colonial concern for proper mothering couched in national and imperial interests and a concern over racial degeneration. British women were to be "mothers of the race" (p. 133). In this context notions of the European bourgeois family and morality became linked with the boundaries of rule in the colonies. A "cult of motherhood" developed.

On the Egyptian side, Shakry explores "the prescriptive literature on child rearing" to demonstrate how it recast women as the center for modernity and sees a parallel. Rejecting to see these trends as derivative of European ones Shakry examines Egyptian discourses seeking an indigenous basis and finds it in the discourse of Islamic reform and renewal and notion of the umma (which interestingly is Arabic for both community and nation). Nation and nationalism, not just colonialism, are European constructs that are instruments of empire and control that the Middle East was thrust into with little preparation. "[T]he constitution of a private sphere of bourgeois domesticity" and the cult of motherhood was part of that European package. Locating parallels between the colonizing and the colonized cannot deny the colonial subjugating plan and its influence by means of power and control on local systems. This is not a situation of being parasitic; it is about being occupied, controlled and subjugated and about local elite interlocutors of empire. Egyptian secular and religious discourse presented in this chapter reveals this inner struggle to cope with involuntary subjugation.

A very original discussion in both content and interpretation is made by Booth in Chapter 5, exploring the biographies of famous women in the early women's press, in the mainstream press, and in biographical compendia of notable women (p. 173). She considers the "Famous Women Genre" of writing as a locus for the construction of "collective exemplary image of womanhood" and focuses on biographies of Jeanne d'Arc published in Egypt between 1879 and 1939. To the question she herself raises in the article "Why Jeanne?" Booth writes on the basis of her examination of writings: "Jeanne's persona, rewritten in Egypt could symbolize identities of immediate import to competing agendas and local struggles" (p. 172). Jeanne could represent the anti-imperialist activist, the devout believer, and the peasant - a western image that is adoptable and adaptable in local terms. "[W]riters turned Jeanne's image against its Western origins, exploiting a potent Western cultural symbol as a visible sign of East-West encounter (a) triumphant struggle of weak against strong" (p. 197). Both Egypt and Jeanne d'Arc fought the British, as it were.

Where I take issue with Booth is when she extends her interpretations to domains that cannot be explained merely by discourse, for example, when she writes: "Jeanne's mission as divine suited a milieu where obedience was unquestioningly a matter of submission to divine law" (p. 186, emphasis added) or when women's public participation is posed as conflicting with private realms. Evidence from ethnography can challenge such comments.

Finally, this is a fine piece that thoroughly describes the development of an image and its incorporation in local imagery and there is no need to justify such good work by beating on the origins of feminism, East or West. There is no doubt that strong elements of the liberal feminist programs came from Europe. Also there is no doubt that culture provides the machinery to incorporate and redefine such elements. These are not new observations nor ones that merit so much space. The real value in this chapter is the well-researched description of a process of incorporation into Egyptian imagery through the mirror of discourse of one particular strong image - that of Jeanne d'Arc.

Sullivan's piece in Chapter 6 also repeats the goal of dissolving the binaries of tradition and modern opting for a model of co-existence in which modernity, antimodernity and feminism are recast as vehicles producing tensions between ideological systems and the challenges of real life. Information derives in part from oral narratives collected by the author beginning in 1990 of memories by Iranian emigres and exiles. She also examines the writings of Shariati. According to

## Reviews

Sullivan, “Seventeen years after the revolution, evidence suggests that women are beginning not only to have an active presence in politics but also to carve out new possibilities for themselves in social, legal, and political life through public debate in women’s magazines, through social and civic activism, and through public office” (p. 234). Modernity is dealt with as a package deal whose “hidden agendas are surprisingly resisted by those who find ways to put new experiences in the old package.” Sullivan concludes that “[w]omen are neither “returning” to a past narrative, nor are they mimicking a Western model of feminism. Instead they struggle to articulate a women’s movement in dialectical conflict with each” (p. 236). One has to sift through the article to locate the thread of the stories and the points being made. However much sifting, one cannot find anywhere in this book content or reference to the most thorough scholarly works to date on Iranian women - the publications by Ziba Mir-Hosseini.

Lastly, Chapter 7 by Lila Abu-Lughod explores “this vexed relationship between feminism and cultural nationalism (which couches) “the woman question” in the language of cultural authenticity versus foreign influence” (p. 243). Abu-Lughod draws attention to what “is often overlooked: those who claim to reject feminist ideals as Western imports actually practice a form of selective repudiation that depends on significant occlusions” (p. 242). Although the subject of this stated discordance is turn-of-the-century colonialism and feminism in Egypt, Abu-Lughod uses as example for her point today’s Islamists “who condemn feminism as Western stigmatize sexual independence and public freedoms as Western but much more gingerly challenge women’s rights to work, barely question women’s education, and unthinkingly embrace the ideals of bourgeois marriage” (p. 243). This, to the author, is contradiction.

The “latter three are elements of the turn-of-the-century modernist projects that might well carry the label “feminist” and whose origins are just as entangled with the West as are the sexual mores singled out in horror” (pp. 243-244). Abu-Lughod aims to question Islamic rhetorical claims to cultural authenticity and traditionalism, describe some contemporary positions in Egypt on the question of women, and present a critical reading of the work of Qasim Amin, the Egyptian reformer “to show how dependent the Islamists are on the ideas of such early modernizing reformers as these ideas have become transmuted, widely disseminated, and grounded in people’s lives through the socioeconomic transformations of the last century” (p. 244).

What is the source for such a grand plan, since Abu-Lughod had not conducted any field research on the Islamic movement? The source consists of observations from television soaps, contemporary feminist scholarship, secondary scholarship on the Islamic movement and the observations by the other contributors in this volume. As a result, the chapter reads like a summary of her Introduction, with little new content.

Abu-Lughod could not locate a “single Islamist voice” on these matters (p. 253), and observes that those who are rejecting Western ways in fact assimilate them to tradition and “try to find Islamic bases for it” (p. 255). She superficially describes, in other words, one of the most forceful and complex contemporary social movements as if contrived. And in her attempt to dissolve polarities she instead reified them.

In the volume’s conclusion, the Afterword by Deniz Kandiyoti adds materials from her study of Turkey, and points to the importance of specificities of the societies in question in determining the role of their encounters with the West and to the gap in existing studies about the world of men). Turning to Turkey, the masculine ideals of Turkish nationalism, for example, have rarely received explicit attention. She summarizes the volume’s contribution as being on the “complex relationships interconnecting feminism, modernity, and postcoloniality in the Middle East” (p. 270).

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