



Review of Lahoucine Ouzgane (Ed.), *Islamic Masculinities* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 288 pp.

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The growing body of literature that focuses on masculinities is a necessary and pleasing development to those concerned with issues of gender and sexual dynamics. The study of masculinities in recent years has focused on examinations of manhood in North American and European contexts. However, scholarly research has until relatively recently neglected masculine identities beyond the so-called 'western' world. Indeed, as Lahoucine Ouzgane states in his introduction, whereas studies of women in other parts of the world, including women of the Islamic world, seem now to abound, the issue of 'Islamic masculinity' has escaped the same level of investigation. Published as part of the 'Global Masculinities' series, this work offers a much-awaited insight into constructions of masculinity in Islamic countries. It is a groundbreaking new study that will serve as a point of departure for anyone interested in gender identities, particularly masculine identities, in the Islamic world. The editor is currently Associate Professor of English and film studies at the University of Alberta, Canada; his other publications most notably include a sister edition entitled *African Masculinities*.

Through a collection of articles, this work introduces some of the key debates around Muslim men and masculinity by examining diverse aspects and themes of manhood in several different societies such as Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey and the Yemen amongst others. Accordingly, the essays originate from a range of disciplines ranging from sociological enquiries to the interpretation of literature and popular culture. Chapter six, for example, studies the film *Urs bil Kalil (Wedding in Galilee)* and examines the plot line and technical aspects of the screenplay. Chapter ten, on the other hand, draws on the historical and political context of Ba'hist Iraq whilst looking at media influences on gender roles of the period. The themes under scrutiny range from male infertility, sexuality and gendered life experiences to how regimes use gender for political and militaristic aims. In a global political climate that has thrust the subject of Islamic gender dynamics to the very forefront of attention, this book attempts to clarify a whole host of dangerous and misleading assumptions whilst at the same time keeping an admirable sense of objectivity and scholarly rigour. One of its principal objectives is to counter the trend of seeing gender studies in an Islamic context as being solely a study of women and women's lives. It also represents a successful application of men's studies to non-western cultures.

The contributors to the collection resist the temptation to overly attribute constructions of masculinity solely to the doctrine and teachings of Islam, whilst at the same time recognising and underlining its powerful influence. Islam, unlike other world

religions whose influence on gender and sexual dynamics has gradually weakened, continues to be the firm point of reference for all Muslims and the link between religion and culture remains very strong indeed. However, one of the principal arguments of the introduction and the volume as a whole, is that gender roles in Islamic cultures have developed from a complex mixture not only of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadith themselves, but also of cultural and sociological trends that pre-date Islam. Following on from this, the collection also succeeds in recognising the differences between notions of virility from country to country. From the outset, the editor underlines the 'social constructionist' approach of the book (p. 2) and argues that masculinity should be examined in its proper context, that is to say moulded by a wide variety of influences. This, of course, places Islam at the forefront, but also considers socio-economic, social, historical and cultural factors. Nevertheless, the strong grasp that Islam holds over culture is explored and its influences clearly outlined. The introductory passage of the edition also refers to the dangers of slipping back into 'Orientalism' (p. 2) and points to the importance of this issue when examining non-western cultures.

The methodology of these essays varies almost as much as the topics under consideration. Chapter one, for example, is a study of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism amongst young Pakistani men. Durre Ahmed draws on Jungian theory of the psychological role of religion for the individual in order to explore the increase of both 'low' and 'high' fundamentalism in Pakistan. He argues convincingly that the orthodox Islam imposed by the State has alienated other philosophical Islamic trends and has effectively oppressed the mystic side of Islam, resulting in a masculinity that 'has less to do with the visions and teachings of Islam and more with literalism and the pursuit of patriarchal power agendas in the name of Islam' (p.21). Thus, he effectively demonstrates how religion can be manipulated to mould hegemonic masculinity.

Chapters three and four assess how major, culturally influential figures of religion can be reconsidered. By examining the identity of the prophet Mohammed and the interpretation of his persona, lifestyle and teachings, Ruth Roded traces how views of Mohammed have diverged due to a cultural and religious heritage that is, at times, unbridgeable between Christendom and the Islamic world. She clearly demonstrates that Mohammed's humanity was, and is, celebrated by Muslims and explores the different attitudes taken up by Muslims over the centuries to defend their prophet in face of Christian criticisms. Chapter four continues the theme of re-examining religious prophets by looking at the life of Abraham. This chapter highlights the numerous merits of attempts by authors such as Assia Djebar and Mahmoud Darwish to re-work these stories as they attempt to create a new space of understanding that eludes rigid, ritualised readings and gives voice to alternative interpretation(s). This process has potentially radical consequences for Islamic gender.

Through the Palestinian serial magazine story 'My Wife is from the Jinn', Celia Rothenberg looks at the experience of diaspora and return for Palestinian men and argues that the examination of popular literature and, in particular, the motif of the jinn, acts as a springboard for exploring the relationship with the Other (read Israel). Chapter seven focuses on the Palestinian city of Jaffa, a colonial '3rd space' (p. 123). Daniel Monterescu carefully assesses the emergence of three apparent categories of masculinity in Jaffa;

namely Islamic, liberal-secular and situational masculinity. He argues successfully that the discursive fluidity of identities has become a coping mechanism for 'postcolonial strangeness' amongst Jaffan men (p. 138). The shifting nature of gender identities in a rapidly changing Morocco is the focus of chapter eight. Importantly, the danger of insisting on a view of polarised binary gender roles is emphasised and the complexity of power dynamics found in Moroccan gender relations is underlined. By using anthropological and sociological data collected on fieldwork trips, Don Conway-Long examines how women's legal and work-related gains have resulted in a male population bemoaning their own perceived oppression. The approach of anthropological data-finding in the form of interviews is particularly effective here, enabling the reader to gain a real insight into the psychology of Moroccan men.

The disturbing reality of woman abuse in Yemen is the focus of another article. Arguing that concepts of masculinity and gender are key to understanding violence against women, Mohammed Baobaid demonstrates how socialisation leads to a 'societal violence' (p.165) which protects and reinforces fiercely patriarchal norms. Again, the issue of Islam as a point of reference for gender dynamics and how it is perceived as central to male identity is tackled head-on. In addition, the relationship between traditional Islamic society and imported western concepts is brought into question. Chapter eleven is another particularly interesting chapter and also relies on data collected from interviews, this time with homosexual Muslim men based in London. Asifa Siraj traces the dilemma of being Muslim and homosexual and the challenges this represents to individuals as well as the effects on their psychological health, family relations and their ability to fit into Muslim culture. Siraj explores how Muslim homosexuals attempt to negotiate a space in which they can forge a valid Muslim identity when Islamic doctrine has hitherto been interpreted in such a way as to promote only heteronormative genders to the condemnation of all others. This article calls for the reassessment and re-evaluation of Islamic teachings in order to accommodate alternative sexualities. Its particular success is that it builds a convincing case for doing so whilst being firmly rooted in an Islamic religious heritage that is free from ideological (western) bias.

The choice of material in this collection is impressive on the whole, giving space to multiple facets of masculinity across various areas of Islamic civilisation. One possible criticism perhaps is the lack of reference made to masculine gender constructs in Islamic sub-Saharan countries and other Asian countries such as Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population of any country in the world. Another would be the rather obvious omission of any study relating to Iranian notions of manliness. The Islamic revolution of 1979, an event whose consequences reverberated around the Islamic world, was supposedly a return to pure Islamic values and ways of life. Since then, the Iranian State has fiercely tried to bring concepts of gender under its control and has used its particular brand of Islam to bolster these concepts. A study dealing with masculinity and how it has been transformed there in the past three decades would have been of huge interest. Furthermore, although the edition does include one chapter by Siraj on Muslim men outside a predominantly Islamic context, this chapter does not engage directly in discussions of multi-culturalism or clashes of ideology between cultural heritage(s) and limits itself largely to an enquiry of how homosexual men negotiate a space for

themselves within their own religion. To this end, perhaps a study of Muslim men as part of an ethnic minority in a western country would also have yielded useful conclusions, especially in light of recent world events.

Nevertheless, this volume is well researched, highly relevant and provides a valuable base on which to build further studies in the future. The contributors are culturally sensitive and their conclusions are grounded in solid and accurate knowledge of the cultural norms of the country of which they write.

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