BOOK REVIEWS

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This book by Professor Muhammed Al-Da’mi (Baghdad University) sets out to complicate our understanding of 19th-century British and American Orientalism. Al-Da’mi analyzes a body of nonfiction literature that he deems both less politically “interested” in the Arab Islamic world than the work of professional Orientalists of the period and less prone to the Arabian Nights inspired exoticism that characterized much European imaginative literature of the time. He tacitly embeds his project within the arguments of Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978), insisting that “any Westerner who wrote about the Orient is an Orientalist, and his work is inseparable from Orientalism” (p. xiii). Yet, contra Said, Al-Da’mi maintains that the Orientalism of many 19th-century British and American “men of letters” bears an often “incidental” relationship to empire and is more interested in stemming the tides of industrialization and secularization in the West than it is in establishing absolute Western “superiority” over an “inferior” Arab Islamic world. Indeed, these writers mine Arab Islamic history for sociopolitical lessons both positive and negative, calling on Europe and America to look to the Arab Islamic past for models of “civilization” and power and to read that past for warning signs of cultural and political decline.

Outlining key continuities and turning points in the history of European writing on Islam and the Arabs in an informative introduction to the volume, Al-Da’mi moves on in chapter 2 to show how two major trends in Victorian thought—medievalism and Orientalism—responded to an English present that was increasingly haunted by the specters of soulless scientism and materialism, social disharmony, and violent class struggle (compare Saree Makdisi’s 1998 study Romantic Imperialism). Especially fresh are Al-Da’mi’s discussions of Matthew Arnold’s A Persian Passion Play (1871) and Macaulay’s “Minute on Education in India” (1835). Arnold, he suggests, could only vindicate Islam by Aryanizing it; Macaulay, in turn, could only discredit Persian and Sanskrit by de-Aryanizing the two and conjoining them with Semitic Arabic under the new umbrella of the “Asiatic”—this at a time when, as Thomas R. Trautmann’s Aryans and British India (1997) has shown, British Orientalists were cultivating “Aryan” kinship ties with India.

Chapter 3 rightly argues that Thomas Carlyle’s “The Hero as Prophet” (1840) sought, in the example of the Prophet Muhammad, an antidote to Benthamite morality and the mechanized, godless understanding of the universe gaining ground in Victorian Britain. However, Al-Da’mi’s reading wrongly divests Carlyle of all imperial interestedness, ignoring a later lecture in which Carlyle insists that the empire’s Shakespeare would one day supplant the prophet of Islam and render him “obsolete.” He is quicker to spot the workings of empire in Cardinal Newman’s neo-Catholic discourse on Arab Islamic history, the subject of chapter 4. By bisecting Islam into a “barbarous” North and a “civilized” South—civilized, we wonder,
because of its associations with papal Rome and the “Bible lands”?—Newman could at once
admire the “Southern” Muslim Arabs for their essentially dead martial past and despise the
“Northern” Turks whose Ottoman Islam embodied a living threat to Europe, going so far as
to recommend their extermination.

Chapters 5 and 6, which trace the rise of literary Orientalism in the United States through
Washington Irving’s “romantic histories” of the early Islamic caliphate and of Moorish Spain
(1829–66), could easily be collapsed into one. Further, Al-Da’mi too summarily dismisses
the Barbary Wars of 1785–1815 as insignificant. By considering their impact on Irving’s
triangulation of America with Moorish Spain and North Africa, he might enrich his compelling
core argument—namely, that Irving saw in Arab Islamic Spain both the origins of America’s
“discovery” and a settler colony whose rise was “analogous” to that of the young United
States, and whose decline could be instructive to the new nation.

The book’s final chapter sketches a provocative comparison to efforts by Arab and Muslim
intellectuals of the 19th century and the present to tap their own history for models of
social and political “awakening.” Sadly, Al-Da’mi’s initially suggestive link between Anglo-
American literary Orientalism and the discourse of the Arab nahda rapidly devolves into the
unproductive conclusion that Western Arabists can never “know” Arabs and Muslims as well
as the latter “know” themselves. The argument leaves us hungry for thicker and more scholarly
analysis.

Although Al-Da’mi sometimes sacrifices in-depth analysis to excessive exposition or
to vague generalization, his study ultimately succeeds in showing us just how heavily
19th-century British and American literati looked to the Arab Islamic past for ways to restore
their own societies and polities to wholeness. Yet, the obvious interest all of these writers
shared in Islam’s catalysis of Arab empire begs questions that Al-Da’mi never fully explores:
why does the 19th-century British turn to Arab Islamic history as a political “model” coincide
with a period of rapidly expanding British dominion over the Arab and Muslim worlds,
and what might be the implications of that coincidence? Oddly, too, Al-Da’mi fails to explain
why the “disinterested” literary Orientalism he identifies surfaces only in the Anglo-American
tradition. Comparisons to French or German Orientalisms would be welcome. Finally, the
book as a whole suffers from poor copyediting. Its English is too often left unidiomatic and
uncorrected.

Still, Arabian Mirrors is a suggestive reading of early English and American interest in
Arab Islamic history, all the more impressive because war and sanctions on Iraq crippled its
author’s access to recent research. I recommend it to libraries and to researchers interested in
an alternate view of East–West literary–political relations in the 19th century.

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STEPHEN SHEEHI, Foundations of Modern Arab Identity (Gainesville: University Press of

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A complex and creative analysis of select literary works of mostly Lebanese, Syrian, and
Egyptian intellectuals of the 19th century, Foundations of Modern Arab Identity argues that
Arab minority elites actively produced indigenous ideologies of modernity while struggling
against the overwhelming powers of Western colonialism. Stephen Sheehi claims that “a new
Arab identity was constructed through experimentations in language, rhetoric, and of course
literature . . . in the era of capitalist and imperialist expansion” (p. 6). As evidence, he cites, for
instance, Butrus al-Bustani’s *Khatba fi adab al-‘Arab* (Discourse on Arab Culture) and *Nafir suriyah* (Clarion of Syria); Salim al-Bustani’s romantic novels *al-Huyam fi jinan al-Sham* (Love in a Damascene Garden), *Salmah*, and *Samiya*; Nu’man al-Qasatli’s novellas *al-Fatat al-Amina wa-ummuha, Riwayat Anis*, and *Marshid wa-fitnah*; and other innovative *maqamat* writings by a variety of authors. Each text is briefly summarized and subjected to a postmodern and psychoanalytical analysis, based on a bricolage of theoretical concepts including Lacan’s lack, desire, and subjectivity; Derrida’s veil; Foucault’s discourse and power; Zizek’s law, order, and subject; Hegel’s dialectic; Bakhtin’s theories of intertextuality; Jameson’s national allegory; and Paul De Man’s genetic pattern idea, interweaving rather sophisticated theoretical ideas in a dazzling and at times overwhelming manner. This is not a book for the faint of heart or for an undergraduate classroom. It presupposes familiarity with Arabic literary genres as well as Western literary and psychoanalytical theory, as well as the ways in which to link ideas of subject formation, ideal ego, and self to a vast array of literary protagonists, their authors, and the political, historical, and social contexts in which they reside.

The main argument is very clear-cut: modernity was not produced only in the West but had its origins in the Arab world, more specifically among atheist or Christian Arab writers (even more specifically, Levantine Christian Arab writers who converted to Protestantism) who had to define themselves not only against the West but also against the Islamic majority around them. This intelligentsia worked hard to reconcile the “tension between the need to maintain cultural authenticity and the need (*ḥāja*) to assimilate Western positivist knowledge and social principles” (p. 78), which resulted in a plethora of new narratives, genres, and styles in Arabic literature that expressed an original sense of Arab identity through “the representation of a subjective ideal or ideal-ego” (p. 27). In Butrus al-Bustani’s foundational *Discourse on Arab Culture*, the search or desire for knowledge is the basis for a modern subjectivity. In contrast to Western subjectivity, which is based on the “knowing subject” as opposed to an external, “unknowing subject” (presumably the dominated, colonial Other), Arab subjectivity includes both the “knowing self” and “unknowing self,” or, in Sheehi’s words, “the Arab Other is endemic to the Arab Self himself” (p. 24) or “the Arab subject becomes Other to his own sense of Self” (p. 27). This dichotomy was set up discursively, if not historically, by the accounts of the “ignorant” Umayyad dynasty juxtaposed to the “enlightened” Abbasid rule and was implanted in the Arab psyche to the degree that it created “a critical lacunae in psychic and social organization that generates a delusionary world vision” (p. 24). However, rather than immobilize and stifle Arab culture, this binary finds its dialectical resolution in “the representation of the third term,” which can be, for instance, the literary figure of a European humanist or a wise Arab ruler or good government (pp. 28, 58–60).

After the two-chapter discussion of Butrus al-Bustani’s work, Sheehi turns to other literary genres, beginning with the work of Butrus’s son Salim. The subsequent discussion of the role of the romantic short story or novella is particularly evocative. Sheehi draws on Doris Sommer’s work on the role of Latin American romance novels in creating subjective desires that can be transposed to the love for emerging nation states. Sommer argues that the literary yearning for a (heterosexual) union can be read as an allegory for the struggles of national unification. Similarly, Salim al-Bustani’s novels are to be considered “as a pivotal site of cultural and political contestation at a moment in Arab history where modernity was well on the way to being naturalized, where identity and nationalism were finding a language, and libido and economy were finding a secular representation” (p. 104). Moreover, the innovative *maqāmāt* works of the Egyptian writers ʿAli Mubarak (ʿ*Alam al-dīn*) and Muhammad al-Muwaylihi (*Hadith ʿIsa ibn Hisham*) are cited as examples of a new literary genre aiming “to work, speak, and create national, subjective, and libidinal consciousness, new organizations for the public and private selves” (p. 138).
While the discussions of the literary works are certainly thought-provoking and new, the reader has to ask herself to what degree these chosen literati are representatives of a wider national or modern Arab identity. Sheehi is very clear about the limitations of his research sample, calling it “lopsided” (p. 12), yet he proceeds to make rather broad claims about “Arab subjectivity” in the 19th century. This might be a direct result of his choice of theoretical framing—drawing on structuralist, psychoanalytical thinkers who believe in universal truths—as much as a sincere belief in the representations of subjective ideals in the literary output of minority elites as mirrors of larger social and cultural transformations. These minority writers addressed not only “the West,” but also Islamic thinkers of their time. The analyses of important historic debates between Farah Antun and Muhammad ‘Abduh or Jurji Zaydan and Rashid Rida only scratch the surface toward the end of the book, and only there does Sheehi address more fully the minority position of his literati. Sheehi needs to be applauded for his innovative study that brings to our attention significant, but lesser known Arabic literature of the 19th century; yet, it is hoped that his next book picks up where this one left off.

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Larbi Sadiki’s The Search for Arab Democracy requires a great deal from its readers. This is not only because the book takes up a perennially challenging area of political inquiry, but also because its arguments are indeterminate and its structure kaleidoscopic rather than linear. Such absence of closure and order is largely deliberate, a reflection of Sadiki’s indebtedness to a poststructuralist understanding of democracy in terms of a “democratic ethos.” This approach takes democracy more as a commitment to perpetual disruption of those forces that concentrate power and establish political exclusion than as a system of governance or set of procedures to realize popular sovereignty. Although the subtitle of The Search for Arab Democracy promises an account of presumably democratic “discourses and counter-discourses,” the book is less a systematic analysis of arguments about democracy conventionally understood than an attempt to recuperate a legacy of cultural syncretism, intellectual crosspollination, and creative disruption of supposedly fixed truths and texts from Arab Muslim traditions and histories. Indeed, the book is an admirable attempt not only to advocate but also to enact the democratic ethos by constantly interrogating its own assumptions and categories, and it is only in these terms that Sadiki’s rather odd, and in some cases counterintuitive, choices of thinkers and arguments make sense. (The extensive discussion of al-Farabi—hardly a thinker concerned with democracy however it is construed—as a “source of inspiration to contemporary Muslims to engage Democracy” [p. 390] is a case in point.)

Sadiki’s interest in recuperating this history is ultimately guided by contemporary politics, for the book seeks to destabilize a series of oppositions that currently govern much of current scholarship, political practice, and geopolitical maneuverings between West and East, Orientalism and Occidentalism, reason and revelation, politics and religion, democracy and Islam. Sadiki is particularly concerned to undermine the opposition between Islam and democracy, a polarity reinforced by both Orientalists and some Islamists (what Sadiki calls “the rejectionists”). He does so not only by “defoundationalising” democracy through its transformation into an ethos released from entanglement with specifically Western experiences and shibboleths, but also by seeking an “Islamic ethos of anti-foundationalism, communication with difference
and pluralisation within and without” (p. 396). Deriving an antifoundationalist ethos from a religion premised on the existence of a transcendent divinity who has bequeathed to humanity not only a moral code but an entire way of life might seem futile. Sadiki argues, however, that the “unity of God and the belief in God through holy scripture is the ultimate foundation. . . . [T]his is the non-negotiable element that is reproduced in any refigured religious foundationalism. But everything else is open. Under Islam, God alone is not looked upon as another site of power open for human contestability or contestation” (p. 77). These arguments inform his insistence on replacing the opposition between fixed ahistorical essences called Islam and Democracy with a multiplicity of historically contingent islamics and democracies that at times intersect, crosspollinate, and even reinforce and refigure each other in unpredictable ways.

Sadiki is quite persuasive here, and his analysis is a welcome antidote to the current political purchase of Manichean views that divide the world into Islam versus the West, and then map this “civilizational” divide onto a distinction between antidemocratic and democratic forces. It is also a timely corrective to particularly anemic definitions of democracy in terms of largely “cosmetic” procedures—successive national elections, for example—that in many places in the Arab Middle East serve to shore up rather than pluralize and disperse state political power. Particularly illuminating in this connection are Sadiki’s interviews with Islamist men and women from Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, the Renaissance Party of Tunisia, Jordan’s Islamic Action Front, and Hasan al-Turabi’s Islamic National Front in the years 1992–94. Perhaps the book’s greatest contribution to current scholarship on both Islam and democracy is the rich and textured discussion of the interviews with the members of the four groups, which provides an invaluable window onto arguments of Islamist women that are all too often reduced to silent symbols of either victimization or moral virtue. If taken at face value, the activists quoted here debunk generalizations about a single antidemocratic stance by Islamists. Indeed, Sadiki argues that contemporary Islamists are profoundly engaged in a democratic project, understood both as an attempt to read democratic practice into Islamic sources and to uphold “their right to borrow what democracy and how much democracy as befits culture, history and local values” (p. 371; emphasis in the original).

Yet, taken as a whole, this valiant effort is not wholly successful. In the first instance, the book could have used substantial editing. Not only are there a surprising number of grammatical errors, typos, repetitions, and misplaced punctuation, but also the pervasive use of an awkward passive voice often makes it quite difficult to determine who is arguing what and when. Moreover, the dizzying array of disciplines, literatures, excurses, and thinkers Sadiki brings into the 400-page endeavor often results in unwieldy extended tangents that overwhelm rather than exemplify the democratic ethos he seeks to enact. Such space would have been better spent more carefully theorizing, clarifying, and substantiating several arguments and concepts central to the book. An example is “the West,” which is largely represented as coextensive with individualism and secularism, a somewhat odd characterization given, for example, the messianic tone of the current American administration and the often noted religiosity of the American public. Sadiki writes, “Since the ‘death of God’ in the West, liberal democracy has, more or less, assumed the role of a new religion, and the nation-state has become quasi transcendental. This ‘death’ has no analogue in the Middle East. Thus, the blurring of religion and politics is a fixture of politics in the Middle East” (p. 8). In a book explicitly committed to undermining all essentialisms and polarities, the Orientalist binary between a secular West and a Middle East in which religion and politics intertwine reappears. The repeated invocation of “liberal democracy” as if the terms are obviously consistent is also problematic given the efforts by both Euro-American and Muslim political theorists (such as Abdolkarim Soroush) to disentangle democracy from the history and premises of a liberalism that is inextricably associated with secularism and the rise of bourgeois capitalism. (Sadiki’s inclusion of Thomas Hobbes as a democratic theorist is a case in point. Although Hobbes
arguably figures among those thinkers crucial to the development of liberal political thought, he was no democrat.)

Finally, Sadiki claims several times that all this “contesting and rethinking provide a potentially coherent gestation that augurs well for good government” (p. 64). Although it is not at all clear that the increasing contestability of all certainties automatically bodes well for “good government,” the fact that there is no systematic argument about what “good government” entails makes such declarations difficult to assess, particularly given Sadiki’s redefinition of democracy in terms of an ethos concerned with “a fluidity of power so that no single claimant or contestant, human actors or the ideas, truths and sets of knowledge from which they derive their hierarchical position in society, can monopolise power…” (p. 65). Sadiki obviously cares about the need to vacate authoritarian rule in the Arab Middle East—hence, the arguments about the necessity of women’s political participation and inclusion, for example, and the corrosive consequences of the alliance between “foreign powers” and authoritarian Arab regimes—but the connection between the infinite contestability he so values and the emergence of “good government” remains undertheorized. His portrayal of such gaps in the argument as a deliberate rejection of “the Anglo-American approach” (p. 375), which demands of scholars answers as well as questions, is not, unfortunately, much help.

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REVIEWED BY WAÏL S. HASSAN, Program in Comparative and World Literature, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; e-mail: whassan@uiuc.edu

This is an important new study of selected poems by four 20th-century Arab poets: Ahmad Shawqi, Ma’ruf al-Rusafi, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and ‘Abd al-Wahab al-Bayyati. The first two chapters focus on Shawqi’s poems on the occasion of Cromer’s departure from Egypt, the Dinshaway massacres, and the French bombardment of Damascus. The third chapter treats al-Rusafi’s poem on exile and the fall of the Ottoman state, which he championed. The fourth focuses on al-Sayyab’s rewriting of T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” in his poem on the Maghrib. The last two chapters are devoted to a few of al-Bayyati’s poems on Palestine and Iraq. Thus, although the four poets in question include one Egyptian and three Iraqis, their poetry demonstrates their pan-Arab (or pan-Islamic, in al-Rusafi’s case) inclinations.

Hussein Kadhim accomplishes two things. First, he attempts to bring the insights of postcolonial theory to bear on modern Arabic poetry, in a salutary line of inquiry begun by Terri DeYoung’s seminal 1998 book, Placing the Poet: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Postcolonial Iraq. The explicit themes of much political or “occasional” poetry call for such investigations of the relationship between politics and aesthetics, which until recently have been polarized in varieties of philological, formalist, new critical, and structuralist criticism. Investigating the imbrication of poetics and politics was the hallmark of Marxist literary criticism until the emergence of the feminist, postcolonial, and cultural studies approaches, which are still slowly making inroads into the field of Arabic literary studies. Although there are now several book-length studies of Arabic fiction that benefit from such approaches, studies of poetry remain strikingly rare, and Kadhim’s new book is a welcome addition.

Second, Kadhim demonstrates that focusing on the themes of anticolonialism does not preclude the methodological privileging of close textual analysis. The bulk of the book consists of detailed readings of fourteen poems, several of them short, which he translates into English. Many of those poems are translated for the first time. Another feature that enables Kadhim
to foreground politics and poetics at the same time is the careful historical contextualization and detailing of the circumstances of composition of each poem, which then emerges as a worldly event, a poetic intervention in a specific historical situation. Given the public role of the poet in the Arab world throughout its history, this approach is the only one that can do justice to poetry.

However, a few questions remain unanswered. The central thesis of the book, namely, that anticolonial poetry “subsumed the political while retaining the poetical” (p. 231), is fairly modest. What great poetry does not? What is the specific achievement of the four poets selected? Indeed, why those particular four among scores of influential and politically committed Arab poets in the 20th century? The author confesses to “a certain degree of arbitrariness” in his choices (p. xii). This concession begs the question, especially since there is little attempt to tie the various chapters together except in very general terms, which renders the structure of the book unclear. There is, of course, the matter of seniority, from Shawqi (1868–1932) to al-Rusafi (1875–1945), al-Sayyab (1926–64), and al-Bayyati (1926–99); yet, chronology alone seems to carry a weighty burden here.

There is also the question of form: Shawqi and al-Rusafi wrote in the tradition of the classical qasīda, while al-Sayyab and al-Bayyati wrote free verse. Traditional (Orientalist) scholarship problematically calls the first group “neoclassicists,” by analogy to 18th-century English poetry, and describes the latter as “modernists,” citing the influence of Eliot. An intermediate group of poets who belong to neither camp and who were influential between the two world wars are called, just as problematically, “Romantics.” This group is not represented in Kadhim’s book. In itself, this omission would not necessarily be a flaw in the book except for the lack of a clearly articulated principle of selection that would address the question of periodization. The postcolonial perspective would have provided the author with a ready tool with which to interrogate traditional scholarship’s reliance on a model of belated mimicry that is said to govern the development of modern Arabic poetry in relation to European literary history.

A longer, more substantive introduction would have addressed most of those concerns. Nevertheless, the readings of individual poets are extremely well researched, with notes and bibliography offering a wealth of secondary sources in both Arabic and English. Moreover, in its emphasis on the political dimension of aesthetics while employing the techniques of close reading and demonstrating a thorough knowledge of Arabic poetics, the book models a fruitful approach to modern Arabic poetry that would be of great benefit to students of Arabic literature at the graduate and undergraduate levels while offering the teacher a valuable resource.

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In the acclaimed Israeli film Walk on Water (Eitan Fox, 2004), a macho, heterosexual Mossad agent realizes that the young German he “befriended” in order to investigate a Nazi family history is gay. The discovery comes halfway through the film, after the two have smeared sunscreen on each other, showered naked together, and sat shoulder to shoulder near a fire. The secret service agent, Eyal, is outraged and disgusted, and the film mocks his inability to read the signs that Axel is gay. Besides critiquing the heteronormative standards of Israeli masculinity (and society), the film attempts to ruffle more feathers in that the revelation scene
comes after Axel engages in sex with Rafik, a Palestinian who then joins them on a day trip to Jerusalem. The budding amorous relationship annoys Eyal no end, eventually climaxing in an unjustified release of aggression that shows all—Axel, his sister Pia, and the Palestinians—who is the boss, who has power, and, ultimately, who is the real man. Fox, a seasoned filmmaker who addressed homosexuality in many of his previous films, attempts a complex attack on some of the holy cows of Zionism and Israeli identity (including homophobia and heteronormative masculine ideals). The film exemplifies many of the issues analyzed in Raz Yosef’s book *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema*, and it is unfortunate that the release of the film coincided with the release of the book, so Yosef never had a chance to include an analysis of the film. Still, films like *Walk on Water* and *Yossi and Jagger* only make manifest the importance of a book such as Yosef’s to uncovering the treatment of male homosexuality in Israeli culture.

The past fifteen years have seen the emergence of a substantial critical discourse on Zionist ideology and Israeli state institutions after the 1948 war. Researchers from social sciences, history, and the arts, to name just a few fields, have tackled different forms of inclusion and exclusion in the ways in which the Zionist narrative has manufactured itself as the quintessentially unified modern Jewish narrative. In film criticism alone, researchers have shown how the Zionist narratives exclude and subordinate the Mizrahim (Ella Shohat in her groundbreaking book *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*) and more recently how Palestinians, the *naqba*, and even Holocaust survivors are presented as “Othered” to the Zionist project (Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*). Yosef’s book joins this good company as he analyzes the homophobic tendencies of Zionist thinking and its effects on Israeli cinema. At the same time, Yosef excavates homoerotic as well as overtly homosexual scenes in films that span some eighty years of Israeli productions. As such, the book serves as a dismantling tool of the myth of Israeli heterosexuality, reminding the reader that latent tendencies always circulate under the surface of (what seems to be) unified ideological commitment. Particularly striking is this analysis when the subject is the bastion of Israeli masculinity—the army films.

Yosef sets his theory as a binary of the exilic male Jew versus the new Israeli man; the diasporic (European) Jew was classified as effeminate, weak, and queer, and early Zionist thinkers, from Herzl to Nordau and others, aspired to see a new Jew—strong, muscular, and unmistakably heterosexual. However, the transition to this new ideal was fraught with contradiction, misgivings, and ultimately latent queer tendencies. Yosef spends much of the first chapter laying out this master narrative theory, and in many ways this chapter represents both the strength and the weakness of the book. The analysis is thorough and draws on many fields (early Zionist writing, Zionist and Israeli history, Jewish studies, queer theory, and more), and it is compelling—that is, within its own bounds. This theoretical paradigm is applied to an analysis of early Israeli films from the 1930s through the 1950s, films that assert Zionist ideology with intense commitment and yet exemplify those latent queer tendencies. The second chapter looks at nationalism, militarism, and masochism, and at the ever subversive presence of homoerotic tendencies in army films. This chapter—drawing much from Freudian and other psychoanalytic writings—carefully unravels complex psychological and emotional structures, which are in stark contrast to the overt commitment of the films to Zionist masculine ideals of both nationalism and heterosexuality. These two chapters are convincingly argued and are fascinating.

However, the theoretical reliance on a binary set of oppositions has a price, and that is the price of exclusion. In later chapters Yosef briefly examines the marginal representations of gay Mizrahi men and of gay Palestinians, and while he complains about simplistic, shallow, and stereotypical filmic representations, I would argue that his own theoretical configuration ends up marginalizing those same groups all over again. In the later parts of the book,
Yosef repeatedly promotes the idea that class, ethnicity, and race should be accounted for in a multiplicity of gay identities, rather than all grouped under the title “Israeli gay men” (which represents Ashkenazi identity positions). Clearly, the aim of the book is to expose the problems of such a race/ethnic-blind approach, but because Yosef’s own theory relies so heavily on unpacking the historical Ashkenazi binary of diasporic equals gay/Israeli equals straight, there is little theoretical room outside the margins. Yosef is accurate, of course, in the historical analysis of such marginalization, but he could, as others did (Shohat among them), postulate a theoretical framework that is more open and hybrid, in much the same ways he prescribes films to be.

Also nearly excluded from the discussion are women and most aspects of gender theories (beyond queer theory). It may not be surprising given the focus and scope of the book, but I would still argue that an analysis of how women fit in those masculine, heterosexual, nationalist structures would have enriched and complicated the binary thesis. Once we take into account masculine heterosexual men, homosexual men, and women (both heterosexual and homosexual), the dyadic limitations of the theory must be dissolved for a more nuanced approach. Yosef often refers to the queer Jewish man as described in feminine terms, and he always puts “feminine” in quotation marks, maybe to designate that the feminine is not an essential trait. However, he does not go further in an analysis of the position of women in Zionist ideology, the effects of masculinized nationalism on women, and the light such an analysis sheds on the presence and representation of gay men. Again, the focus of the book need not change, but the references to the representation of women are sporadic, specific, and hardly used to augment a generalized argument that could have strengthened and complicated the book’s thesis.

Theoretically, and within its scope and aims, I find the book strong in its articulation of its arguments and the support material. Like many academic books, it is written in humanities-specific lingo. The film analysis is thorough, but because Yosef refrains from providing clear synopses of the films, the book seems to be intended for the culturally informed reader, which is unfortunate. Finally, the book could have used more thorough editing and proofreading. The typos are small but persistent and leave a bad taste of carelessness from the side of both author and press.

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Those familiar with Iranian culture will recognize that the title of Michael Fischer’s book refers to the Iranian movie Mute Dreams and to Sadiq Hidayat’s acclaimed novella, The Blind Owl. As for Dispersed Knowledges, Fischer points to “the fragmentation of knowledge that ensued in the aftermath of the destruction of the Zoroastrian empire” by the 7th-century Islamic incursion, stories of which were later recollected by the 11th-century Persian poet Firdawsi in the Shahnama (The Book of Kings, p. 6). Following this tradition, Fischer’s own book brings together fragments of Iran’s oral, literary, and visual representations, spanning a millennium, to examine how they are depicted in contemporary Iranian cinema. Like his earlier works on Iran, this book offers a well-documented account of different cultural layers—particularly Islamic and Iranian—that have developed alongside one another over centuries.
Fischer provides broad descriptions of important turning points in Iranian history and offers numerous acute observations as he focuses on three decades of Iranian cinema and its place in local and global contexts or what he calls “transnational circuitry.” He begins his survey of “modern” Iranian cinema with Dariush Mihrju’i’s 1969 film Gav (The Cow), and the reasons for choosing such a film are revealing. As one of the most significant of the Persian new wave films, Gav takes its cue from several cultural aspects as well as many new genres, particularly surrealism, which was introduced in 1939 to Iranians through Hidayat’s The Blind Owl. The eccentric lives of “psychotic” individuals presented in both works correspond to what Fischer describes as “the Iranian version of surrealism…reacting against a rigidified, fundamentalist, and patriarchal universe” (p. 154). Fischer describes how Gav and The Blind Owl were both products of a new mode of Iranian “intelligentsia” (rawshan fikran). Engaged in a culture of resistance and influenced by European tropes, the new cultural products of this intelligentsia were later rejected by revolutionaries, who saw them as antagonistic to their “traditional” Islamic views. Despite these objections, Iranians since the Islamic Revolution have continued to produce films that at times consciously (but cautiously) deal with the aforementioned intelligentsia-related themes. At the same time, these films also negotiate “the religious and ethical ideas of Islam and the Islamic Revolution” (p. 258), thus becoming a “key cultural tool.”

The author’s analysis of various Iranian films—from before and after the Islamic Revolution—goes beyond the pitfalls of banal classification. Fischer introduces these films through complex, overlapping sets of themes. Themes such as ethics and religion are of primary concern in the early Iran–Iraq War films of Ibrahim Hatamikia and Reza Davudnjad. An important aspect of these films is that they rarely demonize the enemy, drawing instead on the “moral themes” related to the martyrdom of the third Shi’i imam in the 7th century. Antiwar in its message, Bahram Bayza’i’s Bashu: The Little Stranger deals with humanistic themes rather than violence, attempting to “reconstruct the society and public spheres after social traumas of…war” (p. 235), and thus embodying a theme that Fischer calls “post-traumatic realism” (p. 257). Torn between picturesque scenes and heartbreaking events, Bashu, together with such films as Crimson Gold, The Time for Drunken Horses, Blackboards, and Kandahar, depicts the difficulty of life in the aftermath of war, not just within Iran but also in regions surrounding it. Belonging to the “corpus of socially conscious cinema,” these films also subtly criticize political restraints and address societal problems—a dominant theme in the works of prerevolutionary authors like Hidayat, Sadiq Chubak, and Buzorg ʿAlavi.

Referring to the Mute Dreams (Gong-i khab didah) of the title—“an idiom…for the state of awakening after a dream, when one is still bewildered but beginning to decipher the images” (p. 1)—Fischer shows us how histories “reverberate throughout [Iranian] films,” as the audience “deciphers images” in the movies of directors like Abbas Kiarostami. The same doubtful view of Hidayat toward the world and the Shi’i “philosophical attitude” of sadness (also shown in Gav) appear in A Taste of Cherry, while symbols from Zoroastrianism and the Shahnama emerge in The Wind Will Carry Us. Fischer delves into these themes while relying on a broad range of theoretical tools such as psychoanalysis, an undertaking that is carried out throughout the book quite successfully.

Fischer brings to his analysis the experience of an anthropologist with an in-depth knowledge of history and critical theory. Through a more rigorous structuring of the material, this insightful approach could present itself more forcefully. While the first two chapters cover a range of oral and written narratives (primarily from Zoroastrian rituals and the Shahnama), the rest of the book is dedicated to contemporary cinema. Nonexpert readers may find it difficult to pursue some of the links that the author draws between the ideas from the first two chapters and those in the rest of the book. In the epilogue, Fischer refers to several interesting topics, including participation of Iranian students in international robotic games,
Buzkashi games of Afghanistan and Central Asia, and contemporary diasporic pop songs. Although a very informative piece in its own right, the connection of the epilogue to the rest of the book is not as clear. However, these minor issues are trivial in a book of such intellectual scope as this.

Fischer’s book is a valuable contribution to cinematic studies. In presenting multifaceted histories of Iran, the author also captures the mood of a nation in all its density. Thus, the book will appeal to a broad audience. Scholars will appreciate its incisive analysis and inspired allegorical remarks. Filled with anecdotes and personal accounts, the book will also be a pleasurable read for general readers who will admire its lively prose and wide narrative sweep. Finally, graduate students who seek to expand their knowledge of Iranian culture and world cinema in general will find the book very useful.

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This book tries in five chapters to shed light on the genesis and role of the institution of royal slaves (*ghulams*) in the first half of the 17th century. In chapter 1, an attempt is made to place Safavid royal slaves in the historical context of other similar experiences in Iran and the Middle East and to give a portrayal of the creation of that institution by Shah ʿAbbas I and his relationship with some of the leading slaves. In chapter 2, more information is offered on the development of the institute under Shah ʿAbbas I, and emphasis is put on the powerful triangle of eunuchs, concubines, and military slaves that came into being after Shah ʿAbbas I initiated the custom of incarcerating all male Safavid princes. In chapter 3, the role of Armenian merchants is discussed in providing capital to the cash-strapped Shah ʿAbbas I and their important role in the silk trade. It is argued that they were part of the royal household just like the slaves. In chapter 4, the patronage of some high slave officials is discussed in the construction of Isfahan. In the fifth and last chapter, the focus is on one slave, Qarachaqay Khan, as a patron of the arts, and as such he stands as a model for many of his colleagues.

There is no doubt that slaves played an important role in the Safavid state, but this book does not offer any new insights or information. That is a pity because its subject matter is of great interest. The four authors have basically condensed the information on slaves in their dissertations and/or earlier publications without adding new analysis or expanding the time period or meaningfully addressing facts and arguments that contradict their arguments. The bulk of the information deals almost exclusively with the period between 1580 and 1670 and is almost nonexistent for the preceding and following periods. The only thing that is “new” is that the slaves are looked at from four different vantage points in one book.

My main problem with the book is the lack of analysis of the genesis of the slaves per se and as a factor in Safavid political life as well as the lack of a clear definition of who were slaves and who were not. The authors suggest that Shah ʿAbbas I created the slave corps, but they themselves indicate that it all began much earlier. For example, they mention that in 1554 Shah Tahmasp I owned 40,000 slaves! Clearly, ʿAbbas I only formalized and further developed an existing system. Further, they do not assess in a meaningful analytical manner covering the entire Safavid period how large the influence of slaves was in terms
of holding high office and what changes therein occurred over time—and in what way their socioeconomic and political behavior as a new elite and/or as individuals differed significantly from that of those who were not slaves.

There is no clear-cut identification of who was a slave. For example, the authors many times state that “gholamhood inculcated loyalty and obedience in the service of the shah.” Did that mean that this did not hold for the Qizilbash and other officials, or for that matter the population at large? That is hard to believe. This lack of an objective definition led the authors to identify groups or people as slaves when they were not. For example, neither Armenian merchants (who are the focus of an entire chapter) nor high-ranking officials such as Saru Taqi and Ganj Ali Khan Zik were slaves; nevertheless, the authors present them as such. Half of chapter 4 is devoted to these two people, despite the fact that they were not royal slaves (Saru Taqi was a free Tajik, and Ganj Ali was a free Kurdish Qizilbash). The same holds for the identification of the ishik aghasi-bashi, qurchi-bashi, tufangchi-bashi, and qushchiyan as slaves (p. 172, n. 11), of which only among the latter were there slaves. The other three most definitely were not, for they were free Qizilbash and Tajik officials. The Armenian mercantile elite of Jolfa (Isfahan) were not part of the royal household, and they were not slaves (p. 52). The very fact that the Shah had to issue an edict to protect them against government officials (p. 58) is further proof of that. Neither these merchants nor slaves “safeguarded and controlled the sale of silk in Iran,” and they did not increase silk production (p. 53). Later the authors stress that the Armenians were in the service of the shah and had ties with the ghulams, but then who did not at that time? As to the two art history chapters, they both are very informative on architectural and artistic issues but not so much about slaves. In fact, they ironically show that patronage of art was not limited to slaves and that it remains to be proven that they had a larger artistic impact than other sociopolitical groups in Safavid Iran.

In short, the lack of a proper analytical framework, particularly a definition of who was a ghulam, and the many questionable generalizations confused rather than clarified the role of royal slaves in Safavid Iran.

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In 2003, when the Iranian lawyer and activist Shirin Ebadi won the Nobel Peace Prize, many Muslim women were inspired by her example. In an interview with the Sunday Times of London, Ebadi is quoted as saying, “All I want is legal equality between men and women. What I represent is a small part of a deep-rooted reform movement in Iran that cannot be stopped.” It is worth remembering, however, that this recognition comes more than a century after Iranian women began their elusive quest for freedom and pioneered social reforms that would improve their status in Iranian society. By looking at the origins of women’s activism in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Camron Amin’s book advances the debate on feminism and women’s political empowerment in modern Iranian society and sheds light on the early history of this subject.

Relying principally on the Persian press, Amin traces the evolution of the “woman’s question” by studying the ways in which the renewal of women, or tajaddud-i nisvan, became implemented as a central social policy for the Pahlavi regime, one juxtaposed against the Qajar
social legacy. The early chapters survey the origins of women’s activism under the Qajars—a somewhat more familiar historical narrative. Amin’s research on the early Pahlavi period, however, is rich and engaging, providing substantive discussions of important legislation such as the Marriage Law of 1931—and by extension, the marriage of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi to Princess Fawzieh of Egypt; the unveiling decree of 1936; and women’s entry into the professional workforce. One of Amin’s most persuasive arguments concerns his application of the term male guardianship to explain the role of the Iranian state in the women’s movement. His insistence on defining the term nihzat-i banuvan as “women’s awakening” rather than its more appropriate translation as “women’s movement” is less convincing. I doubt that the majority of Iranian women from the Qajar and early Pahlavi eras consciously viewed themselves as “awakening” from the deep slumber of tradition into the alert and wakeful state of modern, secular womanhood.

This study offers many thought provoking insights into the woman question in Iran. It is my belief, however, that Amin overstates the role of the Iranian press in discussing the history of the Iranian women’s movement. Although the press was undoubtedly an effective and invaluable medium for the discussion of Iranian modernity and feminist ideals and remains an indispensable source for gleaning information about the culture of the times, a reading of historical materials from sources other than the press, including the actual schoolbooks from the Qajar and Pahlavi years as well as archival documents, indicates that the content and media of women’s education and other instruments of propaganda served an equally important function in informing and influencing the evolution of the woman question in Iran—a question that did not originate in the modern Iranian press. The content of women’s education, in particular, underlines the ways in which the state defined the norms of patriotic womanhood in the period under review. Moreover, the woman question, like the press itself, was not static. There were shifts and nuances in definitions of patriotic womanhood and effective mothering from the Qajar through the early Pahlavi periods, nuances that ought to be more clearly delineated.

Considering the pervasive discourse of nationalism in both Qajar and Pahlavi sources, I find it puzzling that Amin gives scant attention to the nationalist dimension of the women’s debate. As he states, “The Pahlavis did not immediately turn to the woman question in social policy” (p. 46), but they did focus on matters of nation-building and nationalist propaganda from the outset. That Amin does not situate the women’s movement sufficiently within the culture of official nationalism endorsed by the state weakens his theoretical arguments and fails to link the changes in women’s lives with the other monumental cultural shifts occurring simultaneously in Iranian society during the Pahlavi era. In fact, Amin’s analysis and bibliography lack discussion and incorporation of important recent publications on nationalism in Iranian studies and beyond that likely inform his discussions of the territoriality of the homeland and that also evaluate the content of women’s education and empowerment. Moreover, Amin’s discussions of beauty would have profited from his engagement with the growing literature on hygiene, which was intimately connected to the debate on beauty.

Perhaps the most notable absence in Amin’s study is a detailed discussion of the alienation of the ulama during the reign of Reza Shah. With the exception of an informative discussion of the Gawharshad incident in 1935, we know little about ulama attitudes during these years. Amin argues, for instance, that the “loss of power on the part of Iranian men with respect to the shah predated both the Women’s Awakening and the massacre at Gawharshad—and perhaps no class of men felt this loss of power more keenly than the Qajar aristocracy” (p. 109). It is hard to argue, however, that Reza Shah targeted the Qajar aristocracy more than the ulama, particularly where issues of religious import such as unveiling were concerned. When the unveiling decree was promulgated, ulama reactions to the change were documented in British and other sources, and this correspondence reveals a deep-seated fear of the erosion
of Islam from public life. Ulama opposition, however difficult to track during these years, is significant, as it would deeply influence the religious classes and conservative intellectuals in the years to come. Amin’s narrative unfortunately offers few accounts by individuals who opposed the Shah’s reforms. The oral interviews on which he relies often reflect the opinions of upper class and relatively Westernized Iranians of that era, and the text remains somewhat silent on the emerging opposition.

 Nonetheless, Amin’s work is a noteworthy addition to the literature on women in modern Iran. Although I raise these important points of dissent with Amin’s argument, it should be emphasized that this book is carefully researched, well written, and enlightening on numerous issues. It provides a useful discussion of a heated and ongoing debate in modern Iranian and Middle Eastern historiography and should be consulted by those in the fields of women’s history and Middle East studies. Amin’s book also makes a valuable scholarly contribution both in its judicious employment of oral history and its thoughtful reading of more familiar Persian printed sources on the woman question.

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In another attempt to discredit Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis and to refute a categorical distinction between the “Western” and “Muslim” worlds, Azadeh Kian-Thiébaut takes an alternative approach, analyzing the role of Iranian women as agents of change in postrevolution Iran (p. 21). In Les Femmes Iraniennes entre Islam, État et Famille (Iranian Women between Islam, the State and Family), Kian-Thiébaut’s goal is to demonstrate the role of Iranian women, “comme principales vectrices des valeurs de la modernité occidentale et protagonistes de changement dans une société régie par les lois islamiques” (p. 21). Iranian women are not presented by Kian-Thiébaut as oppressed, disempowered beings but rather as dynamic and potent players in the constantly changing sociopolitical landscape of postrevolution Iran.

This book comprises six chapters, as well as an introduction and a conclusion. In the first chapter Kian-Thiébaut divides postrevolutionary Iranian history into three periods: the revolutionary period (1979–88), the period of reconstruction (1989–96), and the period of political development (1997–present). The author outlines the social, political, legal, economic, and religious situations in each of the three periods, paying particular attention to the status of women. Much of the data presented in this chapter is statistical, which Kian-Thiébaut presents to the reader in long paragraphs of percentages and numbers. Although interesting, such copious amounts of data would be more understandable to the reader if presented in the form of charts or tables.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on the transformation of the woman as the emblem of the family in postrevolution Iran. In the process of sacralizing the family, at least ideologically, the state managed during the first period (1979–88) to accomplish two goals: to remove women to the private sphere and to create a resource for regulating social problems such as premarital sex and divorce (p. 101). Kian-Thiébaut makes the distinction that the sacralization of the family and the subordination of women did not happen at the moment of revolution. Khomeini’s views on women changed over time, culminating in the idealized woman who is chaste, fecund, dedicated to her family, and obedient and subservient to her husband (p. 105).
Chapter 3, “L’Islamisation de la Famille” (“The Islamization of the Family”) focuses on the implementation of Islamic religious law (shari’a) establishing the man as the undisputed head of the family. According to Iranian law, men are accorded the following legal privileges: the unilateral right to divorce (although in July 2000 the sixth Parliament adopted a law granting women the right to divorce based on nine specific conditions); polygamy; the right to perform mut’a (temporary marriage); and custody of children in the instance of divorce (pp. 101–46). Kian-Thiébaut quotes heavily from the writings of Ayatollah Khomeini and other religious conservatives such as Ayatollah Morteza Mottahari. Equal attention is given to those whose interpretations of the Qur’an and shari’a differ, such as the anthropologists Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Shahla Haeri, as well as the activists Azam Taleqani, Shirin Ebadi, and Mahboubeh Abbasqolizadeh (p. 119). What this book ably demonstrates is that the religious elites of Iran (the mullahs) are not unanimous in their opinion about the role and status of women in society. The profusion of women’s organizations and magazines further demonstrates that, despite the controls placed on women by the Islamic state, women’s voices and actions are integral to Iranian civil society (p. 14).

Chapters 4 and 5 reflect Kian-Thiébaut’s ethnographic research, based on interviews with 100 educated and noneducated working mothers living in Tehran and Isfahan beginning in July 1994 and ending in July 1997 (p. 161). Kian-Thiébaut’s research comes alive through the voices and experiences of her informants, whose ages range from the early twenties through the midfifties (p. 162). By selecting a particular type of woman who is urban, working, a mother, and active, the author does not take into account the experiences of Iranian women who are homebound, rural, and non-Shi’a vis-à-vis Islam, the state, and the family. One must ask, despite the fascinating stories told by the women in these two chapters, whether a truly balanced perspective of women as agents of social change is being presented. Kian-Thiébaut does not interview women from the holy cities of Mashhad or Qom, nor does she include the experiences of women from culturally different regions, such Sunni-dominated Kurdistan or Azerbaijan.

The sources used by Kian-Thiébaut in her study are comprehensive, ranging from the Persian language women’s journals Zanan and Farzaneh, to numerous daily newspapers. Governmental publications and census reports provide much of the statistical data in the study. European-language secondary source material also figures prominently, and Kian-Thiébaut sometimes relies a bit too heavily on research and interviews, such as her own previously published work and the extensive ethnographic research of Ziba Mir-Hosseini. The most important source of her research is the interviews conducted with Iranian women and public figures, male and female, over a period of four years. These interviews prove that the role of women is a hotly contested issue within the Iranian public sphere. By reasserting their need and right to work, through alternative interpretations of the Qur’an and shari’a, and by participating in the public sphere, women have forced the state, the mullahs, and their husbands to recognize and take seriously the power of women on both individual and mass levels.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion Kian-Thiébaut makes in her study is that in the more than two decades since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the ideology of the state and the demographic reality do not connect. She observes that since the revolution the population has doubled, becoming increasingly urban and young (p. 54). President Khatami was overwhelmingly elected for the first time in 1997 by women and young people, and Kian-Thiébaut’s research indicates that it is these two demographic groups that are constantly pushing the religious elite who rule Iran to change. Despite this fact, the author concludes that even more important than mass movements and women’s networking is the role of the individual woman and her refusal to submit to the patriarchal ideology of the state to effect change (p. 280).

By far the most significant contribution that Kian-Thiébaut’s book makes to the fields of women’s studies, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies is the observation that women’s oppression is not an inherent aspect of Islam. Structural inequalities such as access
to jobs, a livable wage, and social resources are not unique to Iran but exist to varying degrees in all patriarchal societies. Although Kian-Thiébaut does not make this distinction clear, it is nevertheless an essential element to her preliminary assertion that there is no categorical difference between the West and Islam. Her conclusions would be greatly strengthened by a clearer demonstration of this point; otherwise, her opening argument refuting the “clash of civilizations” thesis is diminished. Yet, Kian-Thiébaut skillfully and convincingly demonstrates that the challenges and inequalities Iranian women encounter as citizens of the state, as members of the family, and as Muslims are similar to those experienced by women in other parts of the world.

Despite the minor weaknesses in Kian-Thiébaut’s study, this book makes an important and necessary contribution to the study of Iran, gender, and Islam. Kian-Thiébaut has powerfully and convincingly demonstrated the central role that women have played in contesting and creating their roles in postrevolutionary Iranian society. It is hoped that this book will be translated into English, so that it may be more effectively used in the classroom.

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John Collins’ book is based on a subjective approach to the Palestinian youth who took part in the intifada in the late 1980s. Based on fieldwork that he carried out in 1997 in the Balata refugee camp, near Nablus, this socioanthropological investigation gives us the opportunity to confront political representations expressed by the uprising’s protagonists. Assuming that young people were central political actors during the intifada, Collins considers that they incarnate a core issue of Palestinian memory and nationalism. Palestinian identity, he asserts, is reshaped by a problematic generational dimension.

Collins’ original approach allows us to penetrate the intimate realm of Palestinian politics where individual experiences interact with national history and enrich it with new significance. Personal narratives related here provide us with concrete ideas about the meaning of the intifada to its protagonists as well as their conception of their role in Palestinian society and in the struggle against Israel. The author distinguishes several main “rhetorical modes” interlaced in his interviews. Heroism is a dominant mode, one that characterizes Palestinian discourses throughout the book. Participating in the intifada was an opportunity for youngsters to prove their manhood and to impose themselves in the community. Their young age at the time is a source of pride, as well as a sign of their vulnerability opposed to the powerful Israeli army. The strength of the weak is also illustrated by the character of the “mother” who manages to frighten Israeli soldiers when she confronts them in order to rescue “her children”—all of the stone throwers of her living area. Victimization is another ambiguous narrative mode. Young people refuse to consider themselves victims, because their involvement in the struggle breeds their self-esteem, yet they are tempted to emphasize their positioning as victims through testimonial when they seek to convince the world of their suffering. The author is aware that his presence as a social scientist encourages this type of nationalist narrative. Guilt is expressed by adults who realize their impotence to protect their children from occupation. Potential allows young Palestinians to imagine the future victory. In addition, empowerment describes their ability to gain authority in their own society. Rather than structural patterns, these “rhetorical modes” are different repertoires that protagonists can use alternatively or simultaneously.
Collins’ approach in terms of spatial memories is an inventive and fruitful way to expose readers to strategies engaged in during the intifada, combined with the process of transformation within the public sphere. During the intifada, home and school are no longer sanctuaries of intimacy or education, because Israeli soldiers might penetrate either. Streets and schools are places of political socialization and mobilization, where young people negotiate new sets of rules or impose their choices on parents and teachers, organize strikes, and sometimes lead riots. In the views of the young activists, prison is evoked not so much in terms of Israeli repression as in the militants’ space par excellence, where political education is dispensed and received.

The author is conscious of the romanticized aspect of remembering the intifada and produces an analysis of the “moral chronology” that young residents of Balata refer to and which helps them deal with the gap between the objectives and the results of the uprising. Collins argues that an unsatisfying present reinforces the idealization of the past. The uncertainties of Palestinian autonomy and the marginalization of the intifada’s actors intensify their anxiety. However, despite the distance that he manages to keep from his interlocutors, Collins fails to question what he considers to be one of the central representations of the intifada generation. He acknowledges that generational unity is more a perception than an historical fact, but he still considers generation as the primary category for understanding Palestinian society during the intifada, ignoring other, more profound social and political dimensions. The social tensions that are deeply rooted in the Nablus area, especially between the urban bourgeoisie and the inhabitants of the Balata refugee camp, are barely mentioned. Little is written about antagonisms generated by rival political affiliations.

Reducing the intifada to personal narratives produces another ambiguity. In Collins’ book, the uprising is portrayed essentially through stone throwing and violent confrontations with the Israeli army. The civil disobedience movement conceived by elder militants and the attempt to reach self-sufficiency in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that mobilized teachers, doctors, and engineers constitute the foundation of the uprising that is ignored completely here. Collins seems to not pay any attention to other different, multiple levels of involvement during the intifada: the elder militants, who initially organized the mobilization, the occasional stone throwers, or those activists who at some point decided to pick up guns. All of these figures melt away in Collins’ vague notion of the “intifada generation.” This undifferentiated approach maintains the myth of a unanimous Palestinian mobilization, even if Collins mentions the process of fragmentation that develops under Palestinian Authority rule. In his interviews, the belief that self-interests tarnished the purity of the struggle is strong. The Palestine Liberation Organization’s leadership in Tunis is often accused of having spoiled the authentic mobilization of the original intifada. How this mythical vision of the uprising affects the youth of Balata in their attempt to cope with the Palestinian Authority remains a central issue of Palestinian politics to this day.

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Lawrence Davidson’s America’s Palestine examines the important British Mandate (1917–48) period in the history of the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The book covers a range of topics that bear directly on official and popular American positions on Palestine,
including American Protestant missionary interest in the region, the rise of a politically influential American Zionist movement; and the rise of a less politically influential, although by no means absent, Arab American organizational network. One of the main themes the work traces is the differing positions taken by American presidents and the State Department. The author outlines the ways in which American Jews ingratiated themselves with American politicians, both at the executive and legislative levels, pushing forward the Zionist project in Palestine. In the early part of the 20th century, according to Davidson, members of these two branches of government became, and remained, beholden to the well-funded and influential American Jewish Zionist organization, thereby making the Palestine conflict a local domestic political issue. Conversely, career diplomats in the State Department had no constituency to cater to for votes and thus viewed the conflict as a matter of foreign affairs.

Davidson supports his argument that the media of the day channeled American popular and official opinion to support Zionism in Palestine at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs through an examination of four American newspapers—the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, and the Chicago Tribune. Prevailing racial and cultural stereotypes at the time, along with a different set of journalistic standards from today, Davidson notes briefly, allowed reporters to editorialize and opine in their stories and thus shape public opinion according to their own perspective. Joseph Levy, for example, the New York Times Palestine correspondent and an American Jew, consistently covered Jewish events in Palestine and therefore presented a one-sided view of the emerging Arab–Jewish conflict. Davidson frames his analysis by showing how the politics of this period remained guided by the 19th-century European imperialistic worldview, which divided the world into colonizers and colonized, superior and inferior races, good and bad, right and wrong. This worldview gave justification to British rule in Palestine and, according to Davidson, pervaded American newspaper writing in this period. Although the book is quite successful in offering a view of public opinion during a time for which we have no polls on a subject for which no oral history has been done, one might still ask whether newspapers were the source of information for all social classes in American society or only for members of the educated elite, who ran for Congress and for the presidency.

Separate from the newspaper analysis, Davidson analyzes State Department records, which provide, in tantalizing detail, the ways in which the American government competed among its branches for control in forming policy and playing politics over the Palestine issue. The records are instructive in tracing American governmental involvement in the issue and provide the background to the question of why successive presidential administrations have supported the Israeli state, regardless of its actions, over the principles of self-determination and human rights for Palestinians. The president, who is beholden to election cycles and the politics of vote getting, binds the State Department, an executive agency, in its policies and actions. Quite simply, as the author demonstrates from the State Department records, the American political will to solve this conflict has not been evident historically. Although the records provide wonderful detail in historical hindsight, they were unseen by the public at that time, leaving readers perplexed by the fact that the book’s two main sources, newspapers and State Department records, are so seamlessly tied together in the author’s narrative as shaping American public opinion on the Palestine conflict.

Although his analysis of newspapers is replete with evidence suggesting how Americans’ positive opinions toward Jews and negative opinions toward Arabs/Muslims took shape during this period, the reasons he chose this research topic are absent, as is a discussion of his methodology. That America had no controlling political position in Palestine at the time and that America’s real Middle East interests lay in the Arab oil-producing regions on which America’s domestic political economy depended are facts the author mentions cursorily, yet
he does not offer them as his reason for writing the book. The book is clearly critical of the influence that American Zionists had on successive administrations and on Congress, leading to unquestioned American support for Zionist Jews in Palestine and a lack of support for the indigenous Palestinian Arabs. The result of the latter partly led, Davidson surmises, to the ultimate destruction of Palestinian society in Palestine in 1948, yet the author never informs the reader that this might explain his need to write this book. One can only speculate that Davidson might be compelled by more recent American political history, in which American presidents have backed the Zionist Israelis with little to no thought to the indigenous Arab population of Palestine or to the positions of the oil-producing Arab states, and thus set out to examine the roots of this support.

Davidson’s *America’s Palestine* comes as part of a group of books published recently—Obenzinger (1999), Christison (2000), and Little (2002), which have considered American literature, presidential administrations, and U.S. Middle East foreign policy, respectively—examining American attitudes toward Palestine during the last 100 years. It seems clear that there is rising interest in the role that America has played in this conflict. Scholars examining both the official and popular records on the subject of Palestine perceive deception and injustice in the ways that successive administrations and popular writers, among others, have presented and represented the conflict and its primary opponents. Although methodologically problematic, readers will welcome the archival material that Davidson has uncovered and perhaps turn to it to substantiate their own arguments, positions, and scholarship on the question of Palestine.
past and neo-Ottoman trends. It is this emphasis on the historical process of change that enables White to perceive, for instance, in relation to the question of women’s covering (tesettür) that it “is part of an internal national dialogue between people who choose to emphasize one aspect of Turkish history and culture over another. One is Ottoman-inspired, the other Western-inspired, but both are Republican discourses. It is an intensely national conversation” (p. 53).

White argues that the Islamist movement in Turkey can best be approached within a new conceptual framework, that she terms “vernacular politics.” It is the failure of conventional approaches to grasp the way Islamism garners support simultaneously at the levels of local culture, civil society, and political party organizations that leads her to generate this framework. White argues that vernacular politics captures the discrete and even contradictory forms of organization and bases of solidarity that exist in the Islamist movement in Turkey today; this framework also illuminates the dynamics behind the puzzling practical gap between the relatively short life spans of Islamist political parties and the durability of their social movement bases. As White notes, “vernacular politics was a political process that linked the Islamist social movement with the Welfare Party in such a way that activists ultimately were independent of the party, although party and movement reinforced and strengthened one another” (p. 122).

As White formulates her argument on the nature of Islamist mobilization through the lens of vernacular politics, she notes that this mobilization “may not really be about religion, despite the high decibel rhetoric. Instead, Islamist mobilization may be part of a process of indigenous modernization that reshapes culturally distinct lifestyles and ideals, institutionalizing and commercializing them and linking their everyday practice to new forms of public life and political practice. Rather than a homogenous religious movement, Islamist mobilization can be a political process that brings together new coalitions of people with varied and often highly practical goals” (p. 271). Hence, according to White, it is the struggle with modernization that leads ordinary people to employ Islam as their conceptual tool; the ensuing Islamist movement is not, however, uniform in that, in spite of the projected unity of the ideological rhetoric, it incorporates many elements with different motivations and positions.

It should be noted that White’s formulation of vernacular politics appears to be not much different from the Gramscian theory of hegemony and civil society. The book would have benefited from the articulation of this theoretical lineage, especially because White makes some allusions to the Marxian approaches to culture (for instance, in chap. 1, which is entitled “The Political Economy of Culture”) and rightfully highlights the significance in her analysis of social class. It is specifically White’s emphasis on class that enables her to criticize the neglect in current scholarship of the differentiation between the roles and locations of educational and economic elites. She is also able to capture how the Islamist movement in Turkey has appropriated the discourse of the left to its own advantage. Furthermore, White manages to identify how the politics of Islamism is not a simple “politics of the poor,” but rather a vernacular politics that incorporates both the elites and the masses at different levels of autonomy.

While examining the vernacular politics of the Islamist movement in Ümraniye from the standpoint of the activists, White also compares the modus operandi of the Islamist activists to that of the Kemalists. The former emerge successful in achieving personalization (face to face contact) and popularization (embedding ideas within local norms and values) whereas the latter fail to situate their message in local cultural values and norms. This comparison is immensely useful in that it reveals how and why the Kemalists who initially attempted to lead the modernization of the populace eventually lost steam. Extending this Kemalist–Islamist comparison to the rest of the book would have greatly increased its analytical significance. Hopefully the author will further develop this comparative approach in her future work.
It should be noted that the book contains a few conceptual errors. In her overview of the Islamic movements and groups in Turkey, White mentions among current Islamic movements the Ticani along with the Nurcu. Yet, the Ticani presence in Turkey was always limited in scope and did not survive after the 1950s, whereas the Nurcu movement was and still is the most powerful civic movement in Turkey. One can also take issue with White’s categorization of the Süleymanlı and Nakşibendi groups as “fundamentalist” because, given their alliances with center-right political parties, these Islamist groups are generally characterized in the literature as “conservative and nationalist.”

There are several minor spelling errors as well. For instance, “Cahit Zaferoğlu,” “Davit Dursun,” and “Fethullahçılar” that are mentioned in the text should be, respectively, “C. Zarifoğlu,” “Davut Dursun” and “Fethullahçılar.” The author also refers to the Turkey Volunteer Organizations Foundation and the Journalists and Writers Foundation as examples of “Nurcu Fethullahçı” organizations. It should be noted, however, that the former is not a Fethullahçı organization but a platform for various Islamic and conservative nongovernmental organizations.

In summary, this ethnographically rich work presents a powerful and meticulous examination of the Islamist “vernacular politics” in the 1990s that is able to provide a plausible explanation for the success of the Welfare Party. It approaches the complexities of the Islamic politicocultural currents in contemporary Turkey from the perspective of modernization and social class to argue that the Islamist success in Turkey was a consequence of the particular cultural strategy the ordinary people from different classes in Turkey employed in their struggles with modernization. Hence, in all, even though theoretical elements of the book could have been further articulated, it still makes a major contribution to the study of politics and Islam in contemporary Turkey.

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This book investigates the current political challenges confronting the two ethnic communities, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot, in their attempt to resolve the tensions separating them. Layer by layer, Salih makes apparent the various counterpoints and locates them in the social relations and strategic interests of regional powers such as Greece, Turkey, the United States, the European Union, and the former Soviet Union. These power contestations have played a major role in the body politic of Cyprus’ sovereignty, security, role in the Middle East and the Balkans, and indeed its entry into the European Union. Salih argues that the concept of a “unified Cypriot identity was eroded as each community articulated the ethnic and national priorities of their motherlands, Greece and Turkey” (back cover; chap. 1).

The book is divided into nine chapters. It first historicizes these political counterpoints by showing the concrete effects of the failure of the partnership (chap. 1), that is, the Turkish invasion (chaps. 2–3), ethnic conflict resolution (chap. 4), attempts to reassess the failure and the unfinished business of invasion and secession (chap. 5), the process of further militarizing the island (chap. 6), and how seismic diplomacy between Greece and Turkey informed and forged possibilities for rapprochement (chap. 7). Chapters 8 and 9 contain the conclusion and epilogue. Salih allows us to move through the difficult terrain of negotiating peripheral states’
power in the production of regional and global power. His work elucidates how forces larger than just the two communities and their own process of accommodation and rapprochement inform negotiations about failed partnerships.

The realist and liberal conflict resolution frameworks the author draws upon to explain the “failures” in diplomacy do not allow us to read the gender, racial, or class components of this conflict. Although these frameworks’ major focus is on the state as well as the international institutions of conflict resolution and security, Salih provides us with rich resources to understand that power is heteronormative (“Makarios’ ‘unusual homosexual proclivities’” [p. 5]) and gendered (i.e., who is more masculine and, indeed, more powerful). Such power dynamics play out in negotiating regional alliances in this “new” world order as well as the Greek and Turkish Cypriots’ leadership’s masculinity. On both sides of the island, the leadership attempted to “outdo” the “other” through access to different resources, creation of particular economic alliances, and further militarization of communities. Former President Clerides’ attempt to deploy and parade the Russian S-300 missiles stands out as one example. “Cleridis said that he was pleased by the immaculate military hardware, and pointed out, ‘there is more which we are not putting on display’” (p. 163).

The author’s sources are excellent, and he draws extensively on the current discourses on security, terrorism, liberal democracy, and genocide as they are promulgated in local and international media and United Nations texts, as well as on relevant theories of conflict resolution, political economy, and Orientalism (p. 177) to explicate his thesis. For these reasons, this book is an excellent contribution to our present knowledge of the subject at hand. It allows us to recognize that conflict, war, militarization, and negotiations are not contained within the borders of what are historically and legally constituted as sovereign states. Rather, these social relations are informed by larger strategic and ethnic and national priorities of powers such as the “motherlands” (Kurdish question, liberalization of the economies of Greece and Turkey, collaboration around the Balkans) and regional interests (European Union) rather than merely the interests and narratives of Cypriots themselves.

For example, when Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz discussed these issues with Greece on 2 November 2000, he stated, “To be an EU member is a Turkish goal. But it will never accept unilateral solution on the Aegean and Cyprus in order to reach this goal. We would prefer instead of spending so much money on weapons to spend it somewhere else” (p. 197). Salih posits that the stalemate results from the asymmetries between Greek and Turkish Cypriots as well as the strategic relevance of Greece and Turkey to the definition of European, Middle Eastern, and Balkan politics. “After 1963, Greek Cypriots sought to marginalize, terrorize, and subject Turkish Cypriots, thereby eliminating intercommunal dialogue and inhibiting the creation of a State” (back cover). Plans for conflict resolution and rapprochement are contingent and are continually informed by a “revitalization of traditional cultural, political, and religious values, bolstered by security threats” (back cover). Moreover, these plans are not necessarily always implemented to support the interests of the majority but rather to support elites’ privileges.

This book is a must for professors, nonprofit organizations, and institutes that work on issues of conflict resolution as well as Middle Eastern politics. It allows us to recognize that the new neoliberal project and its implementation in Europe can be an opportunity to bring about a fair resolution of the present stalemate. According to Salih, the provision of the Kofi Annan plan provided the Cypriots a potential moment to break the political deadlock. The leadership, Salih argues, had a “blind obedience to political ends and military means” (p. 302) and found many of the points of the plan compromising their interests.

Salih’s point is well taken within the liberal, conflict resolution frameworks he employs. If the author had theorized the rich data he so brilliantly provides us concerning the domestic and transnational restructuring of Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus (pp. 204–10, 256) while utilizing
Said’s Orientalism framework to explain the asymmetries that exist among the different actors involved in Cyprus, he could have demystified the various responses that emerged from the two communities regarding the Annan doctrine. In addition, Salih could have used his politicoeconomic data (e.g., International Monetary Fund, World Bank, European Union subsidies) to shed light on the connections among productions of domestic and transnational power relations and implications on the stalemate in Cyprus. Nevertheless, the book is very productive, and it is highly recommended for courses on the Middle East and international conflict because it allows us to understand the complexity and contingency in negotiating power and conflicts within Cyprus as well as regional power productions.

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Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi: A Study of Neo-Mahdism in the Sudan is at once a biographical study and political history. It focuses on the career of the Sudanese Mahdi’s son who was born posthumously, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi (1885–1959), who weathered fierce British opposition in the early years of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium (1898–1956), consolidated wealth and a popular following, and emerged as a leading force behind Sudanese nationalist politics. Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman was the architect of what British colonial authorities dubbed “Neo-Mahdism,” a movement that had its roots in Mahdist faith (i.e., belief in the teachings of Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi) but that struck out in a pragmatic, nonviolent direction, becoming something like a cross between a Sufi order and a political forum.

Neo-Mahdism in the early 20th century adapted itself to the realities of colonial rule and gradually articulated a vision of Sudanese nationalism that was based on the idea of Sudan as a culturally autonomous area that deserved political independence from both Britain and neighboring Egypt. (One should recall here that Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman’s father had declared jihad on an earlier Egyptian colonial regime that had ruled parts of Sudan from a conquest in 1820 until the Mahdist revolution of the early 1880s.) Led by members of the northern Sudanese, Arabic-speaking Muslim male elite, the nationalist wing of Neo-Mahdism became closely associated with the slogan, “Sudan for the Sudanese.” It stood apart from other nationalists who called for “Unity of the Nile Valley,” implying strong Sudanese–Egyptian affinity. In 1945, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman established the Umma Party, a manifestation of Neo-Mahdism that remained a political force in the postcolonial period under the leadership of the Sayyid’s grandson (the Mahdi’s great-grandson), Sadiq al-Mahdi.

This volume is a compilation of articles that the author published over thirty years in three journals, Sudan Notes and Records, the International Journal of African Historical Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies. It is the result of careful cumulative research based on a wide range of Arabic and English archival sources, supplemented by Arabic and English memoirs, histories, newspaper sources, and interviews. It draws most heavily on two archives: the National Records Office (NRO) in Khartoum, which includes a trove of papers dating from the Anglo-Egyptian period, and the Public Record Office in London, which contains British Foreign Office papers pertaining to Sudan. Few historians have been able to tap into NRO papers as extensively as Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim, so his use of sources adds considerably to
the value of his study. One problem with the book, though, is that the text is riddled with small typographical and grammatical errors in English and in transliterated Arabic phrases. Brill Publishers deserves praise for sponsoring the new series on “Islam in Africa” of which this book is a part, but Brill also needs to exert a higher degree of editorial oversight, for these stylistic errors ultimately reflect more on the publisher than the author.

This richly detailed study will appeal to readers who already have a firm knowledge of modern Sudanese history. (Those who are new to early 20th-century northern Sudanese history should start elsewhere, for example, with works by M. W. Daly and Gabriel Warburg.) Readers will quickly realize that the author’s approach to Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman reflects admiration bordering on adulation. The author calls Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman the “forerunner and custodian of the 20th century [Sudanese] independence movement,” a “self-made man,” and a “visionary,” a man who could have saved Sudan from many of its postcolonial woes had he lived longer or had political elites followed his example more closely. Anyone who reads broadly about the life and career of the Mahdi’s son can understand why Ibrahim may find him so compelling. Certainly many British men and women who met Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman in the late Anglo-Egyptian period attested to his warmth, hospitality, shrewd intelligence, and, above all, panache and charisma. (By contrast, Sudanese reactions to the man tended to depend on sectarian affiliations.)

Although the author occasionally considers the populist foundations of the Neo-Mahdist movement (notably, the ways in which many humble believers donated their labor to the agricultural plantations that created Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman’s fortunes), he focuses primarily on Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman himself and the educated classes, as well as their interactions with British authorities. The book thereby narrates a history of nationalism and the colonial encounter as it involved Sudanese Muslim elites.

No doubt, Ibrahim has the post-1983 regimes of Sudan in mind when he praises Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman as a model of rational and socially relevant Islam and as a religious pragmatist, not an extremist. The author suggests that, from Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman, Muslims in Sudan and elsewhere can learn to “view their historical legacy intellectually and critically, but never be over-burdened with it” (p. 240). The author builds a convincing case for the importance of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi in Sudanese political history and shows that the Neo-Mahdist movement drew as much from his insights into Sudanese Muslim society as it did from the legacies of his father, the Mahdi.

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This sociological study deals with women’s lives in a Sudan transformed by its government’s “Islamization” project. Conceptualized with great theoretical sophistication, carefully researched, and delightfully written—although not free from at times excessive jargon—this book allows the reader to experience the Islamist disposition through the experiences and discourse of Sudanese women.

Part 1 provides the background to the study. In chapter 1, the author conceptualizes and describes the Islamization project of the National Islamic Front government (1989–present) as, on the one hand, a set of local processes of inclusion and exclusion, cultural homogenization, and social stratification, and, on the other hand, a global, “deterritorialized” project of constructing
an ideal Islamic umma (community). Committed to using religion to upgrade Sudanese “tradition” and moralize modernity, this government created a new social class (of financiers, businessmen, public officials, and so forth), which has included some formerly economically or ethnically marginalized individuals and groups, while excluding many others even further.

In chapter 2, the author conceptualizes the Islamist regime’s gender project as “neo-harem,” a strategy of intensified policing of women’s social space. Many women have experienced neo-harem, the author explains, as a lack of space, while—somewhat romantically—remembering the traditional ḥarīm (or women’s space) as a collective social world, respected and protected by men, free from state interference, and under the authority of (especially older) women. This book shows how different women negotiated the neo-harem and, as active agents in their own lives, created social space and pursued their dreams within the complex constraints of contemporary Sudanese society. The author found that the modes of religiosity women adopted—what she calls “strategic,” “responsive,” and “rigidified” religiosity—were crucial to their “construction of social space” (a second central concept of the book) and their transformation of men’s public space, even partially or temporarily, into women’s private space.

The four chapters of part 2 each feature a different woman engaged in the construction of her social space within the Islamist framework of the neo-harem. Amal (chap. 3), an unmarried girl of lower middle class background, exemplifies women who use “strategic religiosity” to navigate within and escape from the constraints imposed by the state and, in her case, reinforced by her family’s aspirations for social mobility. Making skillful use of her network of women friends, Amal managed to negotiate the system of neo-harem in such a way that she could pursue her own goal to marry a light-skinned, well-off husband who would protect her from the control of both male relatives and the government. Her women friends helped Amal do what she considered necessary: get beauty tips and products (especially skin-bleaching creams, which would bring her looks in line with those of the most prestigious ethnicity and class) and meet eligible bachelors (even via the Islamically approved system of auto-stop!). The author is well aware that Amal, even while escaping from oppressive social norms, nevertheless simultaneously reproduced them. Thus, the everyday is deeply imbued with past and present inequalities.

Nana (chap. 5), a thirty-year-old divorcée with a young daughter, also exemplifies the use of strategic religiosity as a way to sidestep the neo-harem and maximize her own social space and opportunities. When Nana, after her divorce, returned to her father’s house, she found herself financially dependent on her father, resented by her stepmother, and deeply uncomfortable with her lack of status and control in the household. However, since she lived in an old, cohesive, middle class neighborhood of Khartoum, she was able to make smart and skillful use of a wide network of female and male friends (including a number of suitors and admirers) to tap into what the author calls a hidden women’s exchange economy of services, gifts, and favors. Thus, she managed to become financially independent from her father and sidestep his control while simultaneously maximizing her autonomy and space in her relationship with the man who was about to become her betrothed, all the time making sure not to attract the attention of the watchdogs of the government. Thus, Nana’s falaha (social smartness) brought her closer to her goal; to remarry and maximize her social space.

Dalia (chap. 4) was a married, upper class “house-goddess.” Now an ambitious, energetic, and intelligent wife and mother, her dream of studying medicine had been cut short by her arranged marriage to a rich, kind, but also dominant and demanding husband. Dalia exemplifies “responsive religiosity” as a mode of (re-)constructing social space as she embraced a deepened religiosity and accepted and furthered the Islamist project. Dalia reconstructed her social space by joining a Qur’anic study group in the mosque. This was an enormous catalyst for change as it allowed her to challenge herself intellectually, get out of the house and make new friends, transform her relationship with her husband (by asserting her superior
religious knowledge and desire to dedicate her time to God rather than his business guests), increase her social influence (by making neighborhood and family celebrations more religious), and put pressure on the state (e.g., by preventing it from reducing women’s space in the mosque).

Finally, Hiba (chap. 6), a young, lower middle class woman from Khartoum’s sister city, Omdurman, represents “rigidified religiosity” as a mode of shaping social space. Hiba wore the full four-piece niqāb (including face veil, gloves, and socks), humorously referring to herself as “a mobile black object” (p. 139). She kept house for her family, having graduated from the Islamic University with a degree in da’wa (Islamic mission) and unwilling to infringe on and pollute men’s public space by taking a job. Hiba made use of the authority she derived from her superior religious knowledge to take firm control of her social space, which was beautifully symbolized by the fact that her father was forced to entertain his male friends in front of, rather than inside, the house! But Hiba achieved more than that. She chose as her husband, against the wishes of her father and other relatives, a Zanzibari Muslim studying at the Islamic University of Omdurman. In spite of the fact that it is Sudanese custom that the couple refrain from having sex until both the signing of the Islamic wedding contract and the wedding celebrations (the ‘irs, or “real” wedding) have taken place, Hiba did not wait for the ‘irs to engage in sexual relations with her husband and did so in the family home. Finally, determined to promote Islam, Hiba decided to move to Zanzibar with her husband and to travel throughout Africa to engage in da’wa. She not only trumped parental authority but was also extremely critical of the government, which she felt was not implementing Islam adequately. When she went to apply for a passport, the author reports, Hiba railed against having to involve her body (a picture of her face) to obtain her document and showered insults on the public officials present. Hiba’s rigidified religiosity was clearly a powerful mode of control. The author’s analysis of why Hiba donned the niqāb is both moving and telling. Having been a member of a mixed-gender neighborhood youth association when she was in secondary school, Hiba’s gender, class, and somewhat marginal ethnic background had made her vulnerable to young men’s arrogance, arbitrariness, and insults. Adopting the niqāb put a firm end to this. Of course, whether Hiba’s marriage will indeed give her the agency and space for which she hoped or will force her to fashion a new set of strategies to maximize her social space and opportunities remains an open question.

Part 3 consists of a chapter focusing on social spaces at the societal level (market, mosque, and women’s private gatherings) and a conclusion. The author’s analysis of women’s use of the market—a space in which the state, men, and women compete for control—is an ethnographic delight. Women made the shops of certain sympathetic shopkeepers into women’s space by relaxing their dress code and conversation, thus creating a space to make new acquaintances, get news, make political comments, and even plan joint action (e.g., against a merchant who had married a second wife). Yet, when a “stranger” entered this space, women fastened their scarves and comported themselves as expected by the government. They similarly extended their private space to include the mosque. Not only did they organize women’s study groups there, but they also added short social celebrations and even turned the mosque into a child-care space by dropping off their children with the imam, who would have to try to teach and watch them.

In the conclusion, the author reflects on her approach, that of studying social space and women’s ways of constructing it. This approach indeed delivers on the promise made in the beginning of the book, namely, that it would reveal women’s social agency and their ability “to activate their own vision of the world” (p. 40). However, women were not able to undo the new social, cultural, and political realities created by more than ten years of Islamist rule, the author points out. As she puts it, “women’s construction of social space was not ‘a swim outside the pool,’ but rather in the very same water, with heads above it, and they were
ready whenever there was an opportunity to do something that would foster a change in their position” (p. 188).

Perhaps a shortening of the introduction, conclusion, and chapter 1 would benefit the book and make it more suitable for use in the undergraduate classroom. However, this is a sublime book, which anyone interested in women’s lives in an Islamist state will find intellectually deeply rewarding and a joy to read.

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This is a masterly, well-balanced, comprehensive history of the peoples living around the body of a water known by such names as Pontus Euxinus, Kara Deniz, and Chernoe More. Touching both Asia and Europe, the Black Sea has been used for thousands of years to transport grain, furs, wood, and slaves from the fertile north to Anatolia, the Mediterranean, and beyond in exchange for the products of the south. Occasionally it was the venue of invaders, though it served trade more than conquest.

King’s story begins around 700 B.C. and continues until 1990. It is based largely on the writings, sometimes fanciful, of authors ranging from Herodotus, Strabo, and Porphyrogenitus to Evliya Celebi, Compte Segur, and Mark Twain, in addition to many other primary and secondary sources. The book deals extensively with the peoples inhabiting the steppe behind the northern shore, including Scythians, Sarmatians, Goths, Huns, Avars, Varangians, Pechenegs, Uz, Slavs, Norse, Vikings, Rhos (Russians), and Kalmyks. The Cumans (Kipchaks-Polovetsi), who ruled the steppe from the late 11th century to the early 13th century and supplied human stock—and rulers—to Hungary, Bulgaria, Wallachia, and Moldova are entitled to a longer treatment. Armenians and Caucasians, such as the mysterious Colchians living around the Rioni River in today’s Georgia, constituted the sedentary population when the “civilizing” Greeks arrived and the written history began.

In the 1st century B.C., Pompey defeated Mithridates, the first native potentate who had attempted to create an empire that encircled the entire sea. The Getae-Dacis, led by Decebal, resisted Rome between 101 and 106. Traian celebrated his hard-won victory by raising the Forum Traiani in Rome in 113 (also the Tropaeum Traiani at Adamclisi in Dobrudja in 109) to chronicle in gravures—155 scenes and 2,500 figures—the people and events of the time. The Romans abandoned most of the northern shore in 275 and erected a wall between the Black Sea and the Danube to deny the “barbarians” access to the south. From the 4th to 9th centuries the region underwent profound changes as one group displaced, assimilated, or mixed with others to produce new ethnicities.

King rightly emphasizes the seminal role of the Fourth Crusade in putting a virtual end to the Byzantine Empire and indirectly helping to establish the rapidly expanding Ottoman state. The crusade enabled Genoa (and, to a lesser extent, Venice) to direct the main trade of the Black Sea from Constantinople and Caffa in Crimea and allowed the Comneni in Trebizond, who identified with Byzantium and Rome but not Hellas, to establish their own state that, allied with and related by marriage to the inland Turkmen, lasted until Mehmet II’s conquest in 1461.

As King warns, today’s religious, political, and national categories cannot be imposed on the extraordinary mix of languages, religions, and cultures or on the fluid relations among the peoples of the Black Sea. The sea was, in Marco Polo’s time, the “center of an economic
network that extended from the mulberry groves of China to the silk houses of Marseilles, from the fairs of Novgorod and Kiev to the bazaars of Tabriz” (p. 82). In Theodosia, Crimea, amid dozens of languages, “[b]ells from Franciscan and Dominican monasteries pealed the hours, competing with the Islamic call to prayer or the chants of Orthodox and Armenian priests” (p. 84). The political fate of the Black Sea in the 13th and 14th centuries was determined by the Turks and Russians, whose early states in Anatolia and Kiev, respectively, were conquered and ruled by the Mongols. Bringing order and security to the Black Sea trade, the Mongols provided the new model and philosophy of state that the Turks and Russians used to conquer the Balkans and the steppe and unite their own people and culturally heterogeneous subjects into the Russian and Turkish polities of today.

By the 15th century the Ottomans had turned the Black Sea into a “Turkish Lake,” the only power to dominate it to that extent, controlling its lucrative trade until 1774. The fate of the Ottoman state was decided on the shores of the Black Sea that year after Catherine the Great opened the sea to outside trade. Catherine annexed Crimea in 1783 and in 1794 built Odessa into a thriving port. Despite Trebizond’s short-lived revival, the south coast stagnated. The history of the Greeks, Armenians, Turks, Lazes, and others who migrated to seek work in Russia still awaits its writer.

In the 19th century, modernization from above created havoc in traditional society. Tsar Nicholas I, proclaiming Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality to be state ideology, challenged Istanbul’s rule over Jerusalem and the Balkan Christians. The ensuing Crimean War of 1853 and First Balkan War of 1877–78 signaled the end of the Ottoman state. Here, suddenly, King’s detached and absorbing narrative deviates into an unfortunate subjectivity. Russia’s religion-based nationality (and search for territorial security) produced a form of Orthodox Christian nationalism that led to pan-Slavism and was instrumental in the killing or uprooting of some 7 million Muslims from Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. King mentions these deaths as if they were the natural result of history (pp. 215, 229), while he laments at length (pp. 209–15) the fate of Armenian and Greek Christians who were “killed by Turks.” His narrative seems to have been influenced by the local literature, which described the Turks, Tatars, and Muslims as “aliens,” “intruders,” or “infidels,” therefore fit for the killing and uprooting to which I and members of my family, who hail from Dobrudja, have been subject. Such one-sided opinion and inflated figures justify and invite revenge by whichever party is portrayed as the victim. To describe the colonization of Dobrudja by Vlahs from the Balkans as “bringing them to the homeland” (p. 254) is a forced euphemism, which ignores the agony of the Turks and, ultimately, Bulgarians whom they displaced and persecuted.

Apart from these disconcerting lapses into subjectivity and a few minor factual errors, the book is an outstanding work of synthesis, with a broad comprehensive vista and lucid expression. King has successfully condensed a twenty-seven century saga of trade, migration, war, conquest, ethnolinguistic transformation, and statehood into a relatively short, easy to read, engaging story.
historiography. The book is organized as a series of loosely connected essays rather than as a single, authoritative monograph, and it is this that seems to have forced Alam to express his conclusions so tentatively. The attentive reader, however, is likely to derive more intellectual sustenance from this modestly presented work than from many an authoritative tome on the political language of premodern Islam.

Although this book deals with both the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, the former seems to exist more as a foil against which to set off the latter’s novelty. Yet the unfairness of treating the Delhi Sultanate as a standard-issue Muslim kingdom bearing the label “Made in Baghdad” is more than excused by what Alam writes about the Mughals. To begin with, he moves decisively beyond the received schools of Mughal historiography, which for our purposes we can call the religious, the economic, and the comparative. Since they do not count for much in Alam’s book, we can dispense with the last two quickly. The economic or, rather, Marxist school of Mughal historiography has given us a great deal of important data on the empire but little that is interesting about its intellectual life. Its goal is dual: to save Mughal history from the religious school, which places it within a larger narrative of Hindu–Muslim relations, and to tie the Indian past into another kind of large narrative about modes of production. The comparative school of Mughal historiography is not as determinedly secular as the economic, but it, too, tries to link South Asia to a larger political and cultural geography, generally by way of “influences” from the neighboring empires of the Safavids and the Ottomans. However, all of these are very broadly painted, like the supposed influence of Iranian illuminationists on Emperor Akbar, and so do not allow for a serious reinterpretation of the Mughals.

As far as the religious school of Mughal historiography is concerned, Alam points out that its preoccupation with Hindu–Muslim relations is far too narrow, given the empire’s extent, large parts of which possessed no significant Hindu population. He also shifts the attention of this school’s liberal wing from the supposed “composite culture” created by the Sufis to the Mughal state and its political thought. Sufism, of course, has been the favored location of a Hindu–Muslim accommodation for decades, mostly because it is seen, quite anachronistically, as popular or apolitical and therefore easy to patronize. By attending to the political language of Islam in Mughal India, however, Alam does more than correct this bias towards Sufism, which was in any case more involved with militant forms of religion than other forms of Islam. He argues that the religious politics of the Mughals had no independent existence but was instead part of a post-Mongol shift in the eastern Islamic world from Arabic to Persian, and thus from the caliphate as a political model to an imperial form that I call post-Islamic because its legitimacy is based not only in Islam but also in explicitly non-Islamic forms like the Mongol code and dynastic genealogies going back to a pagan goddess.

Alam uses this approach to tell us a great deal that is very interesting about the creation of Persian as an imperial language in which texts of ethics assume pride of place in political thought and in which the concept of religious law is broadened and even transformed out of Arabic recognition. His chapter on the uses of Persian as an imperial language is particularly suggestive. It is a new idea of empire that comes to organize such changes. Such an idea, I have suggested, is a Mongol or post-Islamic one, an idea of world empire in which all peoples and all religions are not simply accommodated but actively claimed. This idea comes through in texts like the Mughal Prince Dara Shukuh’s translation of the Upanishads, which is part of a project to claim the entire past of Central Asia and South Asia for the empire. Among other things, Dara tells us that their translation into Mughal Persian preserves the Upanishads for the empire’s Hindu subjects and disseminates them among the Brahmins more effectively than does the Sanskrit original. The wisdom of the Hindus is appropriated for the empire as a kind of classical past, since its ancient character is invariably emphasized in Mughal texts. In this sense the Hindu or, indeed, Mongol past functions in much the same way that the pre-Islamic past does for Persian literature more generally, which is perhaps why Akbar’s
Historian Abul Fazl claims to have modelled his great epic of the emperor's rule on the *Shahnama*.

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It has become something of a truism to characterize contemporary racial and ethnic relations in Britain as starkly divided on the issue of religion—or, more accurately, on the domestic version of the “clash of civilizations” between Muslims and non-Muslims. In the wake of the “riots” of 2001, and the global and local ramifications of the “War on Terror,” Islamophobia has been near the surface of political, popular, and press discourse—from the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the British National Party to the revivified demands for “integration” of ethnic (read, Muslim) minority communities and the conflation of Islam, asylum seekers, terrorists, and the threat to national security codified in tightened immigration and antiterrorist legislation. Within this overly presentist account, Muslims are placed consistently as outsiders, aliens, foreigners—as always “immigrants.” It is in this highly charged atmosphere that Humayun Ansari’s historical account of the Muslim presence in Britain proves a crucial and significant intervention, exploring the long and multiple histories of Britain’s Muslims and their complex engagements with state and society.

As the subtitle declares, Ansari’s richly detailed historical account traces the history of Muslims in Britain from the 19th century. Drawing on a range of mainly secondary texts, and some primary material, Ansari paints an evocative portrait of a diverse religious community, from the early settlement of Muslim sailors and settlers to the present day. The book is divided into two main parts: the first charts the arrival of the first Muslim settlers from 1800 to 1945; the second recounts the beginning of substantial postwar migration of Muslims from Asia and the Middle East and explores the formation of a Muslim “community” through the struggles over education and political and religious organization. Ansari is always alive to the diversity of histories and positions, and the book includes material on both the more numerous and better-studied South Asian Muslim communities and the smaller, often longer established Middle Eastern and Turkish groups. The differences between Muslim sects and traditions are explored and linked to processes of political organization in the struggle for a “Muslim” voice. Issues around gendered difference and Muslim women are threaded throughout the book as well as in a chapter dedicated to “Women and Families,” and the role of women in this history is fully acknowledged and represented. Ansari also makes compelling connections between the personal lives of individuals and the broader social and political context, and between the local and national struggles and global shifts (such as decolonization).

*The Infidel Within* creates a rich and complex picture of a community in process, charting a journey between arrival and settlement, hostility and the struggles for recognition, the demand for integration and the desire for distinction, and the continuance and transformation of anti-Muslim sentiments. It offers no easy path through these complexities and contradictions, and this is a major strength of the work. In addition, the sheer breadth of its material will make this an invaluable resource for students and researchers alike across a range of disciplines. My only (minor) criticism of the book is that in its search for a “Muslim” history it occasionally downplays and obscures the links with other black and minority ethnic histories with which it is closely interwoven. It is not always clear, for example, what (if anything) is distinctly Muslim about the patterns of arrival and settlement, the reactions to immigrants,
issues of racial discrimination, and so on. Thus, the early disquiet about mixed relationships can be found across racial, ethnic, and religious groups and cannot be separated from broader understandings of racial difference. However, and particularly in the present climate, Ansari’s illustration of the historical and contemporary meshing and fusion of British and Muslim lives and identities is a crucial one, resisting any assertions of separateness from cultural and religious purists from either side of the imagined Muslim/non-Muslim divide.

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As the book’s title asserts, in Voice of America: A History Alan Heil sets out to provide an extensive and seemingly exhaustive account of the Voice of America’s (VOA) often tumultuous sixty-plus-year history. Heil does precisely that, chronicling the early days from the VOA’s birth to the present post-9/11 world where, he argues, the need for the VOA remains crucial. For the most part, Heil presents his historical treatment chronologically, recounting the VOA’s development (technological as well as philosophical) and use in the various hot spots in the world since it first went on the air in 1942. For example, he talks of how “the Voice” (its affectionate nickname) reached out to the people of China during the Tiananmen Square events and how the great majority of the Chinese relied on VOA broadcasts to get a factual and full picture of what was going on. Heil also spends considerable time discussing the turbulent modern history of the Middle East and the VOA’s efforts to report all sides of the story there. He honors the talent and integrity of news staff and reveals that many VOA reporters faced difficulties as journalists—often denied access granted other reporters or refused press accreditation by authorities of other countries.

This book tells the story of America’s voice as seen through Heil’s own eyes, which have more than thirty-five years of observations and experiences on which to rely. From 1962 until he retired in 1998, Heil worked for the VOA as a foreign correspondent, chief of news and current affairs, and deputy director of programs. For the years before he joined the VOA, Heil relies heavily on archives and interviews with former VOA staffers and government officials to describe its transformation from a small propaganda organ during World War II—it was closely linked to the Foreign Information Service and the Office of War Information, and many employees were “drafted” into service—to a respected radio broadcaster that reaches populations whose own state-run news organizations are reluctant to report news they may deem politically sensitive. Heil witnessed firsthand the VOA’s further adaptations, as the Voice ultimately became a global multimedia giant encompassing radio, the Internet, and more than 1,500 affiliated broadcasters around the world.

Heil is also experienced and makes repeated references to the VOA’s ongoing struggle to demand and defend its claim for journalistic independence, despite relying on public funding. Heil details the often acrimonious debate between various U.S. administrations and VOA directors about the necessity of maintaining objectivity and about the VOA’s need to remain completely free of U.S. government influence if it is to be received with any credibility in foreign countries, the only recipients of the Voice’s broadcasts. He presents many examples of government interference and censorship and notes that even when the VOA finally got its charter in 1960, which gave it the green light to be candid and objective, its independence was short lived. As soon as the United States was facing turbulence in a foreign land, censorship and control returned. For example, he writes that when the VOA was not reporting what the
American government wanted during the first Gulf War, it was accused of being pro-Saddam, a claim that subsequent investigations proved false.

In another, more recent example, Heil talks of a VOA coup to interview the Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, an interview the station was planning to air with other material, including President Bush’s address to Congress, to ensure that its coverage was balanced. However, the State Department stepped in and refused it permission to go ahead, claiming that a station funded with public money should not be providing a platform for terrorists. As on previous occasions during times of delicate (and acrimonious) U.S. global maneuvering, the VOA faced interference, which Heil critically questions, insisting that the VOA’s role was to be a forum for all views. He writes of an unnamed reporter’s exchange with State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher during a press conference at the height of the controversy (p. 414):

Question: What can you say to VOA listeners out there who now may have questions about whether the news that they’re listening to is going to be impartial and present all sides of the story?
Boucher: I’m going to say: “You’re going to get the news, as you always have, from VOA.”
Question: Unless the State Department objects to it.

Heil’s failure—and it is a considerable one—is that he never takes the credibility debate between the VOA and the American government outside the United States. Although he provides ample quotes from loyal, satisfied listeners of VOA, there is no room in the book’s more than 450 pages for those who may have questioned the integrity of what they were hearing. In fact, one is led to believe that Heil naively considers all listeners to be blindly faithful and unsuspecting. As such, one needs a dose of skepticism when reading Voice of America, as it is hard to believe that audiences have not questioned the reliability and credibility of broadcasts, particularly in the post–9/11 world where popular suspicions of U.S. government intentions are increasingly vociferous.

Moreover, and according to the VOA news branch stylebook, the Voice is “…not in the business to amuse, entertain or simply inform our listeners. Nor are we in business because news is an end in itself. The United States is in the midst of a serious struggle for the mind of mankind and the only purpose of the News Branch as well as the entire Voice of America is to contribute toward winning that struggle” (p. 32). Heil never takes issue with this statement; he fails to examine it critically or to consider its implications particularly for those on the receiving end.

In one of the final chapters, the author refers to the VOA as “America’s Voice.” However, for a significant portion of the world’s population—and in precisely those regions where the VOA is targeted—there is a growing need to separate the voice of the American people from that of their government. Here again, Heil fails to recognize the actual, on the ground conditions of those countries where the Voice is being heard.

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REVIEWED BY BRUCE B. LAWRENCE, Department of Religion, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; e-mail: bbl@duke.edu.

This is a rare and welcome approach to ethical discourse in Islam. Amyn Sajoo is a political theorist with legal training and philosophical instincts. He identifies vistas without trying to map a program for reconstructing Muslim ethics.
The breadth of Sajoo’s vision can be deduced from the content of each of the four chapters. Chapter 1 looks at the coding of medical issues within a Muslim worldview that stretches from the 12th to the 21st centuries. Abortion, genetic intervention, euthanasia, and organ donation and transplantation are treated with reference to intuitive capacities and cultural proclivities as well as juridical guidelines that distinguish right from wrong. Adab is the code word for that deepest reflex of Muslim humaneness: even while attention to fiqh is indispensable for its application, it also encompasses literature, art, and cinema. Chapter 2 moves the focus to civil society. Sajoo posits civic virtue as the key to civil society: how, he asks, can moral reasoning inform, protect, and enhance civic virtue? Chapter 3 turns to Muslim public intellectuals, examining how they can forge links and make common cause with their non-Muslim counterparts. Throughout this chapter one hears Abdolkarim Soroush, Fazlur Rahman, Nurcolish Madjid, Chandra Muzaffar, Abdullahi Naim, and Ebrahim Moosa in conversation with their counterparts, whether Gertrude Himmelfarb, Robert Putnam, Michael Walzer, Ronald Dworkin, Margaret Visser, or Charles Taylor. The combination of these talents and interests converge toward an agenda of pluralist governance, which is then advanced in the final chapter, chapter 4. Here, Sajoo pushes beyond legal definitions of tolerance and/or pluralism, advocating “a lived ethics of engagement by ordinary citizens” (p. 91). Ethics and human rights are seen not as competitive but as complementary domains for both collective and individual identity.

Can one have an ethics that embraces secularism for its instrumental benefits without accepting its metaphysical agnosticism? For Sajoo, the answer is an unequivocal yes. In his view the key to Muslim ethics qua Muslim ethics is rereading the past not as a palimpsest of perfect societies gone astray or powerful polities defeated by global change but, rather, as a set of resilient resources for forging an interactive future that includes religious as well as other affirmations of the good. High on this list of resources is the 13th-century philosopher and jurist Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274). Nasirean ethics influenced a range of premodern polities, from the Persian Safavid to the Turkish Ottoman to the Indian Mughal empires. For Tusi, moral reasoning was the foundation stone for charting lived ethics. In technical language, ‘aql, or reason, preceded without canceling naqil, tradition. Tusi prioritized the divine order, or namūs allāh. Though he did assign a role to shari’a, it was a secondary role. Muslims could, and should, channel the divine order through shari’a without, however, denying its openness to other instrumentalities for non-Muslims. (For more on Nasirean ethics, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200–1800.*)

The modern day successor to Tusi seems to be Abdolkarim Soroush. Soroush, like Tusi, acknowledges the power of specifically Islamic discourse yet stops short of acceding to its ultimate authority. For Soroush, modern ethics requires a mediated subjectivity, one based on the distinction between religion in itself and religion as a branch of human knowledge. The first, religion in itself, endures without change: the divine creation, like the final consummation, of humankind is affirmed. The attempt of Muslim specialists to understand and apply scriptural dictates, however, does change. It varies according to individual skills, social circumstances, and global forces. In any given period of human history, therefore, religious knowledge is dependent on other forms of human knowledge, including scientific and philosophical interventions.

Ethics, like law, is deemed to be a form of religious knowledge, subject to the same temporal and spatial conditions as are other forms of knowledge. (Soroush’s thought is nimbly explicated in Farzin Vahdat, *God and the Juggernaut: Iran’s Intellectual Encounter with Modernity.*) Religious democracy, for instance, cannot be grounded in Islamic principles of contract, consultation, or consensus, even though these Islamic key words, properly understood, have their correlates in secular principles such as human rights, justice, and spheres of power. Still, a religious democracy (albeit not a theocracy in democratic garb) is to be preferred. Why? Because, unlike its nonreligious counterpart, a genuine religious
democracy can require its citizens and leaders to respect both human rights and the rights of God.

An applied ethical project accenting inclusiveness also has its Western advocates, none more salient than Charles Taylor. Taylor argues that the collective is not inalterably or essentially opposed to the individual. Indeed, the price of radical subjectivity is to exclude the communitarian notion of the good society. Taylor, like Soroush, wants to reclaim a neo-Durkheimian order, one where “the senses of belonging to a group and confession are fused,” where moral issues “coded in religious categories” can be addressed in a public forum that is also secular—to wit, the modern, constitutional state with its democratic principles and diverse electorate (Taylor, Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002], 78).

While recognizing that the full scope of inclusive, applied ethics would entail multiple linguistic and cultural resources, Sajoo limits himself to contemporary ethical writings available in English. He wants to provoke broad, engaged thinking about Muslim ethics, civic virtue, and democratic discourse in Euro-American circles. His monograph opens a debate that is as healthy as it is overdue, not only for ethicists but also for concerned others in today’s globally connected yet culturally divided world.

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This thoughtful short volume of philosophical reflections by Ian Almond, a teacher of English literature at Bosphorus University, is another sign of the recent emergence of the translated, popularized Ibn ‘Arabi, like the poet Rumi, as an independent—albeit problematic—subject of inspiration for both creative writers and scholars from an increasingly wide range of disciplines. In this case, the juxtaposition of Derrida’s hermeneutics and the distinctive rhetoric of the Fusus al-hikam is rendered more meaningful by the author’s actual focus on the French philosopher’s elliptic readings of Meister Eckhart, the medieval philosopher and preacher whose remarkable parallels to the language and approaches of Ibn ‘Arabi have already been explored in important studies by M. Sells, R. Shahkazemi, and a number of other scholars writing in both Islamic and Western languages.

To begin with an essential clarification for readers of this journal, the primary intended audience of Prof. Almond’s work is clearly specialists in deconstructionism who are already familiar with Derrida’s works and related literatures. His particular focus in this study is on suggesting and illuminating certain philosophical potentials of Derrida’s thought through the careful evocation of a few central rhetorical and thematic “parallels” in the Fusus al-hikam that are already familiar to readers of that particular book. Hence, despite the essay’s title, there is no sustained interest in the wider works and contributions of Ibn ‘Arabi, much less in aspects of Sufism more generally.

Despite the manifest impossibility of summarizing any deconstructionist writer—given the intrinsically paradoxical, allusive, and often tortuously qualified language of both Derrida and his interpreter here—the basic stages of Almond’s argument are clearly reflected in the successive chapter titles. Beginning with the most obvious rhetorical features of the “deconstructive opposition to rational thought,” he moves on to evoke three sorts of deeper and, at least potentially existential implications of that challenging rhetoric that are already clearly
more explicit and fundamental in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabi, as indeed they are in the key earlier Neoplatonists (and other familiar non-Western parallels) who are also evoked in this study’s conclusion. Those three basic subjects of reflection—and familiar themes for any student of Ibn ‘Arabi—are the liberating potential of existential “perplexity” or confusion, the correspondingly rich hermeneutics of “infinite” unfolding meanings, and the unfolding spiritual “secret” of “mystery-tasting and abyssality.”

Scholars in the study of religion, including Islamic studies, will immediately recognize centrally recurrent themes in the scriptures and hermeneutics (both written and more practical) of every major religious tradition. In that light, such readers are likely to find most thought-provoking the author’s evocative extension of his “expanded” deconstructionist approaches, in his conclusion, to further parallels in the literary reflections of Blanchot, Benjamin, and Foucault—along with philosophers such as Heidegger, the Neoplatonists, and related non-Western sources only briefly alluded to here. Almond’s essays and arguments carefully map and reflect the intellectual and cultural “Babel” that manifestly confronts every conscientious philosopher and theologian today, whatever his or her own tradition or school of origin. Yet, despite the implicit pessimism of that biblical analogy, Almond’s pioneering efforts, like Ibn ‘Arabi’s, also courageously point to more positive, creatively constructive ways of transcending the unavoidable challenges of that global situation.

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In his interdisciplinary approach, Fuad Khuri weaves together from Druze history, economy, politics, and religion a “thick description” of the present culture of the community. His approach counters that of many scholars who insist on explaining Druze history, culture, political behavior, and even economic development on the basis of theological texts rather than by ethnographic observation. His anthropological insights enable him to distinguish between religion as a way of life or traditional practice and religion as dogma or theology and to present a more accurate interpretation of the difference between ‘uqqāl (wise and controlled people) and juhhāl (the ignorant and imprudent ones). Having interviewed a wide variety of people, he finds that the division between ‘uqqāl and juhhāl is a very arbitrary one. “It does not necessarily reflect the scope of religious knowledge . . . a jāhil (singular) may know more about the tenets of religion than many of the ‘uqqāl” (p. 182). He rightly concludes that, for the Druze, “the mundane and the sacred are so intricately intertwined that separating them becomes [a futile] exercise in hair-splitting” (p. 4). The same conclusion is drawn in a recent study by Isabelle Rivoal, Maîtres du Secret: Ordre Mondain et Ordre Religieux dans la Communauté Druze en Israël (2000).

Khuri’s introduction serves as an abstract of the whole work, explaining how culture and religion are merged into a “single formulation” in which the “religious becomes cultural and vice versa” (p. 1). This formulation is reflected in the community’s traditional customs, religious rituals, ceremonies, ethics, politics, and social fabric. Because each of the twelve chapters can stand alone as an independent essay, the author could not avoid repetitive argumentations, figures, and even expressions when dealing with central themes such as reincarnation, shrines, religious knowledge and practice, endogamy and exogamy, and migration and emigration. However, these central themes are combined to form a principal thesis through which he suggests that the Druze still constitute a cohesive community with strong attachment to their
communal identity, even though they have been exposed to “modernity,” which is undermining the traditional structures of their economy and society. In addition to his ethnographic observations and surveys, the author benefits from multiple historical and anthropological studies, deriving information to fit his arguments and thesis. Every chapter presents the main argument, that is, modernity could not erode the Druze ‘asabiyya (ethnic solidarity and identity). This argument is seen as a predetermined goal and every source of information, anecdote, folklore, poetry, and oral testimony was inserted to achieve that goal.

In the first chapter, the author deals with several community names that enable him to define the ethnic boundaries of the community drawn by outsiders and by the Druze themselves. The second chapter connects identity with land (ard), showing how the Druze have transformed their territory into a sanctuary made “holy” by the presence of innumerable shrines and by considering land as being one of a sacred trinity: ard, ‘ird (honor), din (religion) (p. 55). In the third and fourth chapters, the author provides valuable information on population dynamics, emigration, modern education, and transformation of occupation, and their impact on the traditional life of the community. Despite their impact, these modern factors could not undermine the Druze ‘asabiyya, which “remain[s] undisturbed” (p. 81). Even the emigrants who had integrated within American society began to create “a new ethno-religious frontier… of Druzeness” (p. 100). In the fifth and sixth chapters, which share the title “The Making of Druze ‘Asabiyya,”’ the author assesses the impact of reincarnation and religious leadership on ethnicity and on the “internal cohesion” of the community. In the ninth chapter, the author reviews several studies on the attitude of Druze youth in Lebanon and Israel vis-à-vis the imperatives of the Druze moral code. Since these studies indicate a strong attachment to Druzeness, the author’s conclusion is that “there are no free-floating Druze.” His data on the increasing rate of kinship exogamy does not shake his conviction that the “feeling of ‘Druzeness,’ ethnic identity, is as strong as ever” (p. 211). The written materials published in Israel for the Druze school curricula on the Druze shrines, as well as the author’s ethnographic visits to Druze holy places in Syria and Lebanon, give him the impression that there are “efforts to revive Druze shrines” and testify that ethnic identity “is today expressed more openly and strongly than ever before” (p. 14). Regardless of whether this impression is acceptable, the eleventh chapter on festivals and festivities contains useful descriptive accounts of ceremonies, rituals, and holy places in all Druze territories.

Khuri concludes his work with a chapter on the boundaries of Druze ethnicity, suggesting explicitly a primordial approach. “Belonging to an ethnicity and defending its merits is symbolic in the sense that it is not a ‘rational’ course of action that can be verified or validated by economic principles” (p. 236). This conclusion probably stems from his research question: how have the internal dynamics of history, practice of religion, and socioeconomic development been put together to preserve the Druze community as an ethnic group with distinct boundaries? Different questions might provide a new outlook to many aspects dealt with in Khuri’s study. For example, to what extent have the state ethnopolitics in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel and the use of ethnicity as an instrument by the Druze elite strengthened or weakened Druze ethnicity? In dealing with topics similar to those of Khuri, such as the revival of shrines and tradition, Rivoal finds that “the new interest the Druze showed in studying their traditions [was] not the result of an internal demand…[but] of an external demand that came to the fore particularly in Israel” (p. 56).

There are a few minor shortcomings. The date of Sultan al-Atrash’s speech in Damascus cannot be accurate, because in 1936 he was in exile (p. 23). The Ya’furi’s shrine is situated near Majdal Shams in Golan Heights, not in the Galilee (p. 37–386). The shrines of Shu’aib and Sabalan are not exclusively Druze but are shared by Sunnis. Until 1948 the guardians of both shrines were Sunnis (p. 218). Note 43 (p. 63) should be based on Firro’s 1999 work, The Druzes in the Jewish State and not on Firro’s 1992 work (p. 257). The same error is
repeated in note 26 (see pp. 78, 258). Although the 1999 book deals with many aspects of Druze culture, ethnopolitics, economy, education, and shrines, it is omitted from the sources in Khuri’s bibliography (p. 280). Finally, the Golan Heights occupied by Israel is part of Iqlim al-Billan and is not a separate region (pp. 130–31).

These minor shortcomings, however, in no way detract from the fact that this work is valuable for every specialist, student, and reader who wants to know about the Druze community in the Middle East. Khuri has given us a sound study whose many insights constitute a welcome contribution to our knowledge.