

Some Recent Publications on Islam / Muslims

Men in Charge?: Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger (Eds). 2015. Oneworld publications, London.

Both Muslims and non-Muslims see women in most Muslim communities as suffering from social, economic and political discrimination, treated by law and in society as second-class citizens subject to male authority. This discrimination is attributed to Islam and Islamic law, though it varies considerably in its impact, according to both class and region. Since the early twentieth century there has been a mass of literature tackling this issue, some from a feminist or human rights perspective, some taking the form of an apology for Islamic law.

Recently, exciting new feminist research has been challenging gender discrimination and male authority from within Islamic legal tradition. This book presents some important results from that research. The contributors all engage critically with two central juristic concepts, rooted in *Qur'an* that lie at the basis of this discrimination, concepts which place women under male authority. One refers to a husband's authority over his wife, his financial responsibility towards her, and his superior status and rights. The other is male family members' right and duty of guardianship over female members (e.g., fathers over daughters when entering into marriage contracts) and the privileging of fathers over mothers in guardianship rights over their children.

The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism by Toby Matthiesen. 2014. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Toby Matthiesen traces the politics of the Shia in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia from the nineteenth century until the present day. This book outlines the difficult experiences of being Shia in a Wahhabi state, and casts new light on how the Shia have mobilised politically to change their position. Shia petitioned the rulers, joined secular opposition parties and founded Islamist movements. Most Saudi Shia opposition activists profited from an amnesty in 1993 and subsequently found a place in civil society and the public sphere. However, since 2011 a new Shia protest movement has again challenged the state. *The Other Saudis* shows how exclusionary state practices created an internal Other and how sectarian

discrimination has strengthened Shia communal identities. The book is based on little-known Arabic sources, extensive fieldwork in Saudi Arabia and interviews with key activists. Of immense geopolitical importance, the oil-rich Eastern Province is a crucial but little known factor in regional politics and Gulf security.

Shi'i Sectarianism in the Middle East: Modernisation and the Quest for Islamic Universalism by Elisheva Machlis. 2014. I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, London.

The eruption of violent sectarianism in Iraq following the US invasion in 2003 brought the question of Sunni-Shi'i relations in the country to the forefront of the international public agenda. Empowerment of the Shi'i majority for the first time in the history of modern Iraq and the emergence of a factious political system strengthened the popular belief that contemporary Shi'ism is inherently sectarian. Challenging this widely accepted consensus and providing a more ecumenical depiction of Islam, Elisheva Machlis here assesses the relationship between sectarianism and universalism in Shi'i thought by examining the scholarly interaction between Iran, Iraq and Lebanon in the twentieth century. The author presents a multifaceted and complex analysis of the shifting sectarian identity of Shi'ism in the transition to the modern era, exploring questions of leadership, religious identity, group membership and transnationalism. Examining the relationship between intellectual thought and socio-political development in the region, this book provides a new perspective concerning the future of an increasingly globalised Muslim world.

Freedom of Speech and Islam by (ed.) Erich Kolig. 2014. Ashgate, London.

Freedom of speech and expression is considered in the West a high public good and an important social value, underpinned by legislative and ethical norms. Its importance is not shared to the same extent by conservative and devout Muslims, who read Islamic doctrines in ways seemingly incompatible with Western notions of freedom of speech. Since the Salman Rushdie affair in the 1980s there has been growing recognition in the West that its cherished value of free speech and associated freedoms relating to arts, the press and media, literature, academia, critical satire etc. episodically clash with conservative Islamic values that limit this freedom for the sake of holding religious issues sacrosanct. Recent controversies - such as the

Danish cartoons, the Charlie Hebdo affair, Quran burnings, and the internet film ‘The Innocence of Muslims’ which have stirred violent reactions in the Muslim world - have made the West aware of the fact that Muslims’ religious sensitivities have to be taken into account in exercising traditional Western freedoms of speech.

A Struggle for Identity: Muslim Women in United Provinces by Firdous Azmat Siddiqui. 2014. Foundation Books and Print of Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

This book discusses how the colonial presence influenced the status of Indian Muslim women in the United Provinces particularly after 1857. The issues explored in the book are:

- Educational status of Muslim women and to what extent Western thought influenced the curriculum of women’s education system.
- Perceptions of Western writers towards Indian Muslim women.
- How and why is 1857 a turning point for gender debates on Muslim women in India?
- Locating different shades of Muslim women’s lives in the emerging hierarchical social order.
- How does caste system influence their mobility? The purpose here is to break established stereotypes about Muslim women and society.

Being Muslim in South Asia: Diversity and Daily Life by (eds.) Robin Jeffrey and Ronojoy Sen. 2014. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

The 500 million Muslims who live in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka constitute roughly one-third of the world’s Muslim. Their lives in the twenty-first century are challenging and diverse. Too often in recent years, they have been unfairly associated with terrorism, as anyone with a Muslim name who has passed through a Western airport will attest.

But south Asian Muslims do what other people do: they educate their children, earn livings, travel widely, discuss their faith, settle disputes, arrange marriages, cope with politics, struggle with governments, and support football teams. United by shared adherence to the Holy Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims of South Asia speak numerous languages, follow different local customs, and have varied aspirations for their own lives and those of their children.

The essays in this book probe such aspects of Muslim life. The authors' concerns range from great political debates that have affected Muslim lives to marriage on the east coast of Sri Lanka, schools and media in Pakistan, women's group in Bangladesh, and football team in Kolkata. This work will interest readers who wish to discover the multifaceted lives of South Asia's Muslims.

The Moroccan Women's Rights Movement by Amy Young Evrard. 2014. Syracuse University Press, New York.

Among various important efforts to address women's issues in Morocco, a particular set of individuals and associations have formed around two specific goals: reforming the Moroccan Family Code and raising awareness of women's rights. Evrard chronicles the history of the women's rights movement, exploring the organizational structure, activities, and motivations with specific attention to questions of legal reform and family law. Employing ethnographic scrutiny, Evrard presents the stories of the individual women behind the movement and the challenges they faced. Given the vast reform of the Moroccan Family Code in 2004, and the emphasis on the role of women across the Middle East and North Africa today, this book makes a timely argument for the analysis of women's rights as both global and local in origin, evolution, and application.

Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy by Jonathan A. C. Brown. 2014. Oneworld Publications, London.

This book pick few things provoke controversy in the modern world like the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad. Modern media are replete with alarm over jihad, underage marriage and the threat of amputation or stoning under Shariah law. Sometimes rumor

sometimes based on fact and often misunderstood, the tenets of Islamic law and dogma were not set in the religion's founding moments. They were developed, like in other world religions, over centuries by the clerical class of Muslim scholars. Misquoting Muhammad takes the reader back in time through Islamic civilization and traces how and why such controversies developed, offering an inside view into how key and controversial aspects of Islam took shape. From the protests of the Arab Spring to Istanbul at the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and from the ochre red walls of Delhi's great mosques to the trade routes of the Indian Ocean world, Misquoting Muhammad lays out how Muslim intellectuals have sought to balance reason and revelation, weigh science and religion, and negotiate the eternal truths of scripture amid shifting values.

The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities by Amanullah De Sondy 2014. Bloomsbury Academic, London.

Rigid notions of masculinity are causing crisis in the global Islamic community. These are articulated from the Qur'an, its commentary, historical precedents and societal, religious and familial obligations. Some Muslims who don't agree with narrow constructs of manliness feel forced to consider themselves secular and therefore outside the religious community. In order to evaluate whether there really is only one valid, ideal Islamic masculinity, *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities* explores key figures of the Qur'an and Indian-Pakistani Islamic history, and exposes the precariousness of tight constraints on Islamic manhood. By examining Qur'anic arguments and the strict social responsibilities advocated along with narrow Islamic masculinities, Amanullah De Sondy shows that God and women (to whom Muslim men relate but are different from) often act as foils for the construction of masculinity. He argues the constrainers of masculinity have used God and women to think with and to dominate through and that rigid gender roles are the product of a misguided enterprise: the highly personal relationship between humans and God does not lend itself to the organization of society, because that relationship cannot be typified and replicated. Discussions and debates surrounding Islamic masculinities are quickly finding their place in the study of Islam and Muslims, and *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities* makes a vital contribution to this emerging field.

What Is Veiling? by Sahar Amer. 2014. The University of North Carolina Press, USA.

Ranging from simple head scarf to full-body burqa, the veil is worn by vast numbers of Muslim women around the world. *What Is Veiling?* explains one of the most visible, controversial, and least understood emblems of Islam. Sahar Amer's evenhanded approach is anchored in sharp cultural insight and rich historical context. Addressing the significance of veiling in the religious, cultural, political, and social lives of Muslims, past and present, she examines the complex roles the practice has played in history, religion, conservative and progressive perspectives, politics and regionalism, society and economics, feminism, fashion, and art.

By highlighting the multiple meanings of veiling, the book decisively shows that the realities of the practice cannot be homogenized or oversimplified and extend well beyond the religious and political accounts that are overwhelmingly proclaimed both inside and outside Muslim-majority societies. Neither defending nor criticizing the practice, *What Is Veiling?* clarifies the voices of Muslim women who struggle to be heard and who, veiled or not, demand the right to live spiritual, personal, and public lives in dignity.

Ancient Religions, Modern Politics: The Islamic Case in Comparative Perspective by Michael Cook. 2014. Princeton University Press, USA.

Why does Islam play a larger role in contemporary politics than other religions? Is there something about the Islamic heritage that makes Muslims more likely than adherents of other faiths to invoke it in their political life? If so, what is it? *Ancient Religions, Modern Politics* seeks to answer these questions by examining the roles of Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity in modern political life, placing special emphasis on the relevance--or irrelevance--of their heritages to today's social and political concerns. Michael Cook takes an in-depth, comparative look at political identity, social values, attitudes to warfare, views about the role of religion in various cultural domains, and conceptions of the polity. In all these fields he finds that the Islamic heritage offers richer resources for those engaged in current politics than either the Hindu or the Christian heritages. He uses this finding to explain the fact that, despite the existence of Hindu and Christian counterparts to some aspects of

Islamism, the phenomenon as a whole is unique in the world today. The book also shows that fundamentalism--in the sense of a determination to return to the original sources of the religion--is politically more adaptive for Muslims than it is for Hindus or Christians. A sweeping comparative analysis by one of the world's leading scholars of premodern Islam, *Ancient Religions, Modern Politics* sheds important light on the relationship between the foundational texts of these three great religious traditions and the politics of their followers today.

