
Islamic Masculinities, by Lahoucine Ouzgane, London and New York: Zed Books, 2006. 288 pages. \$75.00.

REVIEWED BY SAMAR KANAFANI

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

This valuable addition to the expanding body of literature in men's studies introduces multiple readings of the experiences of men (and women) in the Muslim World, without the hubris of offering up any explanations of what it means to be a Muslim man. The editor, Lahoucine Ouzgane, who is associate professor of English and film studies at the University of Alberta, intended the book to look critically at patriarchy and structures of self-proclaimed association to Islam. Based on social constructivism, this collection of essays is premised on the principle that individuals and groups participate in the making of gender realities, in this case masculinity in the context of nations where Islam prevails. The term 'Islamic' in the title, as differentiated from 'Islam', points to a distinction between notions of manliness in Muslim religious practices and codes, and social constructs of masculinity that emerge within Muslim society: two things that are all too often conflated. The 12 essays gathered here under relatively loose bearings, avoid slapping 'Islam' in any single-stroke onto the manifestations they address. They lean rather toward de-naturalizing the deep-seated relationship between Islam and patriarchy, and bringing to light its diversity and contradictions, which Ouzgane claims "lie at the heart of the ongoing crisis of Arab and Muslim society, thought and politics" (p. 6).

Islamic Masculinities is at its best with articles that avoid facile or frequent reference to 'masculinity' or 'Islamic' which falsely suggests that these terms are coagulated enough to serve as stable stepping stones on any thought terrain. A good example is Celia Rotherberg's article, "My Wife is from the Jinn: Palestinian Men, Diaspora and Love," where she tackles some themes that dissect the social articulation of 'masculinity' in the West Bank: love-desire, diaspora, (otherness/otherworldliness), proximity-distance.

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

In this autobiographic account, Helvacioğlu presents her bereavement over her tragically deceased parents as a gender transgression within strictly codified religious funerary customs (embalming, prayer, interment, etc.) in Turkey. She insists on washing her mother's body (although Islamic law only permits an officiated female imam to do so), demands to touch her father's naked body, and attends otherwise all-male funerary prayer sessions. Emerging as gender crossovers, her irregular exigencies are a struggle to wrest her parents' corpses from the claims of religious patriarchy, re-appropriating their deaths when their lives could no longer be re-appropriated. With a subtle sense of defeat, Helvacioğlu abruptly abandons this valuable line of thought in favor of a historic overview of the 'gender regime' and 'masculine' public roles and attributes in Turkey since the 1920s. The essay stalls with an enumeration of gender (masculine) stereotypes, leaving the reader wanting problematization of the gender regime rather than its repetition.

Durre Ahmad explores the gendered psychic and symbolic disposition of Islamic extremism among underprivileged men in Pakistan. The strength of her essay, "Gender and Islamic Spirituality: A Psychological View of 'Low' Fundamentalism," lies in her ability to link the psychological experience of popular fundamentalists to imbalanced international relations that have widened social inequalities. She situates 'high' fundamentalism within educated scientific 'modernity', defining 'low' fundamentalism as the uneducated, struggling, and intellectually stifled fall-out of imbalanced distribution of power (p. 23). She argues that Saudi state 'money-theism' (adopted as the Pakistani state's own *modus operandi*), with its focus on material, rational, and technical aspects of Islam, has stifled Islamic cultural diversity, creating a "culturally eroded spiritual environment" (p. 25). Systems of regimented and gender-segregated Islamic schooling and socialization not only exacerbate conditions of financial, social, and political marginality, they also inspire an 'anti-feminine' psychological disposition and the distancing of more 'feminine' and sensual attributes of Islamic belief and practice (e.g. mysticism). Using 'feminine' and 'masculine' as symbolic sets that extend beyond embodiment by either of the sexes, Ahmad remarks that men's need to 'other' the feminine is one way that they consolidate their authority within the modern nation-state. She might have added that such patriarchal strategies are most symptomatic of the heightened boundary patrolling that occurs in fraught nations (fraught from within or threatened from without), of which Pakistan is a good example.

In "Stranger Masculinities: Gender and Politics in a Palestinian-Israeli 'Third Space'" Daniel Monterescu proposes 'situational masculinity' as a model to understand the practice and meaning of men's multiple identity sets among Palestinian-Israelis in Jaffa. He argues that by operating through a broad discourse of 'traditional' gender behavior, masculinity in Jaffa incorporates seemingly irreconcilable essentialist identity components: conservative-modern, Islamic-secular, Arab-Western. Through 'identity play' (the mediation between and permutation of various – in this case essentially conflictual – identities) Jaffan men manage their liminal and contested manliness, juggling multiple value systems which they selectively deploy and underscore. Maintaining his analysis on a semiotic level, Monterescu presents a useful interpretation of gender discourse, but leaves out any substantial description of the situations that require or inspire Jaffan men to shuffle identities.

Marcia Inhorn's article, "The Worms are Weak," brings to this book the slant of anthropology of the body, more specifically procreation theory. Her central proposition is that even when the cause of childlessness among Egyptian couples proves medically to be the husband's infertility, Egyptian women tend to carry the social blame. Organizing her essay around four sets of 'patriarchal paradoxes', Inhorn argues that the prevailing belief that male sperm makes the larger (or even entire) contribution to foetal formation is partly responsible for this uneven burden of responsibility. The other and principal reason, however, is the overarching patriarchal and patrilineal value system, which prompts Egyptian women to conceal their husbands' infertility to protect their social reputations, particularly from other men. This protectiveness stems from

the great threat that infertility poses to normative masculinity in a society where male fertility is equated with virility, manliness, and even 'personhood' (p. 299). She writes that "by feeling compelled to shoulder the blame, they [infertile men's wives] ensure that male infertility remains 'invisible' and hegemonic masculinities remain intact" (pp. 230-231).

Don Conway-Long discusses Moroccan men's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, change in gender relations, particularly as regards power shifts between men and women, both in domestic and public space. The main value of his research is the intriguing observation that changes in the gender order, of both practice and meaning, are prompting Moroccan men to feel 'oppressed' by women. More interesting, however, is his suggestion that this feeling may be contributing, in unseen and unfelt ways, to the self-same structures of gender inequality that men perceive to be at risk. In this accessible and engaging essay, Conway-Long taps right into Ouzgane's general theoretical perspective by basing his analysis on the notion that individual negotiations produce broader ideological systems of gender. Most of the men the author interviewed said they felt 'ambivalent' about the changes the society was undergoing and the empowerment, if incremental, that women were claiming. Men's 'oppression' is one strategy of negotiation whereby men are casting themselves as the victims (the 'reverse perspective'), as a sign of fear of change and resistance against it (pp. 148-149).

With this essay it becomes obvious that the concepts of 'ambivalence,' 'in-betweenness,' and 'liminality' are persistent themes in Ouzgane's collection. Embodying the challenges facing normative and dominant constructs of manliness, these concepts bring out the idea that social change, political struggle, personal tragedy, and migration are all shaping and shifting the ways that gender is played out and articulated in the family and community. That so many of the essays in the book should wind up with presentations of neither-here-nor-there cultural spaces (Conway-Long, Rahman, Helvascioglu), or of contradictory experiences (Monterescu, Inhorn), hints, in my view, at a welcome crisis in the production of dominant masculinity.

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