

Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures. Edited by Gul Ozyegin. United States: Ashgate, 2015.

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In *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures* (hereafter, *GSMC*), Gul Ozyegin brings together 19 chapters by international scholars from a variety of disciplines (such as history, feminist studies, anthropology, sociology) to examine intersections between gender and sexuality in Muslim contexts with the goal of providing an understanding of what constitutes a Muslim identity. As a scholar that has previously worked on gender and sexuality in Muslim societies, I find that *GSMC* contributes to this body of literature by engaging in current and past debates and, thus, is helpful to build an understanding on these issues among those who are not familiar with Islamic studies while expanding the knowledge of those who have been previously interested in these topics. The book is itself an example of the many nuances of a Muslim identity in countries such as Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Syria and Pakistan, among others. It is organised into five thematic sections, each exploring different fields in relation to gender and sexuality through chapters based on in-depth ethnographic and historical research. In presenting the argumentative structure of this volume, my focus will be on those chapters I consider most ground-breaking.

Part 1, under the title “Challenged Masculinities”, addresses the crisis of hegemonic masculinity, which is now challenged and reconfigured under the pressure of different forces (marriage, migration, the army, disability). The included studies present the struggle of men to fight patriarchal constructions. Salih Can Açıksöz (Chapter 1) examines the Turkish state-sponsored assisted conception program, which has been seeking to make fathers out of veterans who got disabled as a consequence of their fight with Kurdish guerrillas. Açıksöz provides an interesting account of how disabilities can lead to an expulsion from hegemonic masculinity. Taking into consideration how both gender and disability have traditionally been used as a discriminatory tool, I consider Açıksöz’s chapter an important contribution to the intersection of both gender and disability studies.

Mustafa Abdalla (Chapter 2) brings the reader to Egypt in order to explore how the introductions of neoliberal economic policies have challenged the positions that men hold in traditional patriarchal schemes. This idea is evidenced through the case of young

men working in the tourism sector and permanently exposed to foreign tourists, an experience that leads them to a greater investment in their bodies in the absence of economic capital. The chapter can be framed within a body of literature that has focused on this type of man and that keeps growing with titles such as *Romancing Strangers: The Intimate Politics of Beach Tourism in Kenya* (Tami 2008) discussing the concept of the ‘beach boy’, and *Islam, Youth and Modernity in the Gambia* (2013) in which Marloen Janson explores the growth in sex tourism on the Gambian coast.

Aisha Anees Malik (Chapter 3) considers the experiences of Pakistani men migrating to the UK by marrying Muslim women of their origin. The study contributes to the understudied intersectional field of marriage, migration and masculinity by focusing on the transnational marriage of men migrating from two specific Pakistani villages to the United Kingdom, which leads to the experience of a gender crisis.

The last three chapters in Part 1 focus on Turkey. Through an approach that does not only include narrative analysis, but also pays attention to the social context through participant observation and in-depth interviews, the last three chapters of Part 1 bring the discussion forward through the inclusion of ethnographies and the analysis of archival documents.

In Chapter 6, “Masculinity and Male Friendship in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Istanbul”, Serkan Delice explores an issue of particular interest for the development of debates on the performance of transgressive masculinities by presenting the experiences of the so-called “beardless youths” (116), lower-class young shampooers offering their sexual services in the *hammams* of Istanbul. This chapter made me think of Khaled El-Rouayheb’s work *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (2005), which offers a detailed account of homosexual practices in the pre-modern Arab-Islamic world, highly recommended for the reader interested in the topic. The advantages of Delice’s exceptional contribution lie in the discussion of the role of the state as a centre of gender production, an issue that El-Rouayheb anticipated in his work but only explored partially.

While Part 1 puts the focus on masculinities, Part 2, “Producing Muslim Femininities, Sexualities, and Gender Relations”, is devoted to women and constructions of femininity through embodied practices. In Chapter 7, Maria Frederika Malmström explores how bodily practices can create a “correct moral and feminine Muslim self” (140). Chapters 8 and 9 are interconnected: in the former, Victoria A. Castillo offers a pedagogical perspective for teaching about Female Genital Cutting

(FGC) and serves as an introduction to the subsequent chapter. Chapter 9, following an interview structure, completely breaks the fluidity of the volume and this could have been avoided by following the same essay structure which is used in the other chapters.

Part 3, under the title “*Mahrem, the Gaze and Intimate Gender and Sexual Crossings*”, presents three studies dealing with sexualities, intimacies and bodies in different countries and historical times. Chapter 12, by Saadia Abib, explores the construction of identities through clothing by focusing on the Madrassah Jamia Hafsa in Islamabad, Pakistan. The use of the *burqa* is presented as a tool that does not only help hiding one’s identity on an individual level, but also creates a sense of community by bringing uniformity to those who wear it.

In Chapter 13, Sehlkoglu moves the focus beyond heterosexual culture in Turkey through the culture of *mahremiyet*, the “Islamic notion of privacy and intimacy” (235). Two examples are used to illustrate how this culture is in danger: *Âlâ* magazine, with its covers showing headscarf-clad young girls, and the kissing protest that took place in Ankara against the banning of public displays of affection. Although the linkage between the two examples does not seem very clear, they both are used to show a shift in heterosexual culture towards new notions of what is permitted and prohibited.

Chapter 14 concludes Part 3, marking a temporal break in the volume with a study on gender and sex in the Ottoman *hammam* or bathhouse. The chapter could have been included in the first part of the volume due to its similarity to Chapter 6, which discussed the role of the beardless young shampooers in the *hammams* of Istanbul. The similarity with the previous chapter both in the topic and historical time makes the volume slightly repetitive and desynchronized. However, and even though the essays significantly overlap in content, it must be admitted that each of them provides a distinctive perspective on the topic.

Part 4, “The Desiring, Protesting Body and Muslim Authenticity in Fiction and Political Discourses”, complements the volume by exploring the use of the body as a protesting tool. Al-Tahawy discusses in Chapter 15 the importance of Arab women’s writing as a protesting tool against conservative and patriarchal cultures focusing on the Egyptian writer Alifa Rifaat. It is an interesting chapter because the author does not only focus on Rifaat’s work, but considers current uses of the body as a means of protest with regard to the Arab Spring and recent events in countries such as Morocco and Egypt. This chapter raises thoughts about the use of the body as a subject to protest,

situating the analysis in a broader context of gendered body protests and nakedness as a political tool.

In Chapter 16, Censi analyses three novels focusing on contemporary Syrian society and written by Syrian women. The detailed analysis of these novels, which are crucial to understand the new meaning of the body, is deeply welcome. Continuing with women issues, and in connection with the previous chapter, in Chapter 17, Sherine Hafez analyses the 2013 trial against fourteen Egyptian women who were members of the Muslim Brotherhood after joining protests. Hafez considers the faces and bodies of this group of women, dressed in white behind bars, to have played an important role “in the process of subject production” (326) evidencing the centrality of the female body as a political space. Reinforced by the other two chapters in this part, the argument is highly convincing when proving that the body is indeed a site of political action.

Ozyegin’s volume concludes with Part 5, which is made of two chapters dealing with feminist and queer questions in Iran. In Chapter 18, Mouri and Batmanghelichi explore feminist mobilization in Iran after 1979. They provide the reader with an interesting reflection on the danger of feminism in creating idealized expressions of gender that could “produce new forms of hierarchy” (350), paraphrasing Butler and highlighting the diversity of approaches that one can find within the feminist movement through the case study of Iran. The use of Butler’s work as a theoretical framework could have been interesting if it had been used from the beginning rather than being introduced in the conclusion, where it seems somewhat out of place.

The last chapter, written by Farhang Rouhani, argues for an analysis of diasporic Iranian’s women memoirs “for the creative expression of kinship and intimacy” (355). It is done through the exploration of Darznik’s book *The Good Daughter*, which develops the story of three generations of Iranian women in permanent struggle for freedom, focusing on reviews posted on Amazon and Goodreads – a methodology that might not be very reliable depending on who authored the review. The chapter concludes the volume paraphrasing Jose Esteban Munoz, one of the fathers of queer utopias, sadly victim of an early death. Part 5 constitutes an excellent complement to Part 4 as both explore factual and fictional narratives of dissent and desire.

In sum, Gul Ozyegin puts together in *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures* nineteen chapters of unequal quality, but nonetheless of extraordinary value to the overall goal of providing an understanding of what has built gender and sexual identities in Muslim-majority countries. It provides an account of today’s bodily, gender and

sexual practices, while also looking at the past through the work of not only well-known scholars, but also those emerging voices who are contributing to the field with their fresh and original research. One of the main strengths of the book is that it offers the reader with specific topics that mainly use ethnographic methods to illustrate new trends in Muslim societies. The disposition of the chapters and the repetitive character of some of them can be seen as a weakness. In any case, Ozyegin's work in editing the volume must be acknowledged as an exercise to challenge conservative notions on gender and sexuality through an extraordinary diversity of disciplines. This is an excellent volume for those interested in Islam, gender and queer studies. In opposition to similar previous works, such as *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies* (İlkkaracan 2000) or *Homosexualities, Muslim Cultures and Modernity* (Rahman 2014), Ozyegin expands the scope to cover issues that had not yet been explored through providing a global perspective while looking at the specificities of Middle Eastern and North African countries. All in all, *GSMC* constitutes an exciting introduction to the new ways in which genders and sexualities are built and contested in Muslim-majority countries.