In the course of this century significant changes have occurred all over the Muslim world in the application of the Shari'ah. Two ideas have acquired prominence in the context of these changes, namely: "reform" of the Shari'ah and "restoration" of the Shari'ah. Both ideas have played an important role in the Sudan's political and social life.

Fluehr-Lobban's book deals mainly with the reform of the Sudan's Islamic law of personal status, the area to which the Shari'ah was confined by the Anglo-Egyptian colonial authority. She found the Sudan to have played a pioneering role among Muslim countries not only in the scope and depth of the reforms, but also in the method by which they were promulgated.

The result of these reforms was a far-reaching modification of the rules of Ḥanafī law originally applied, by replacing them with new rules very often taken from the Mālikī school. The instrument of effecting these changes was judicial circulars issued by the Grand Qadi. This device was first put into effect by the colonial authority, and subsequently maintained after independence by Sudanese governments, until 1980 when the distinction between the Shari'ah and civil courts was abolished and the two court systems were unified.

Substantive changes in the law were started in 1915 when the Sudan became the first country to replace the Ḥanafī law of divorce by the Mālikī law which gave women the right of judicial divorce on the ground of lack of support or desertion by the husband or cruelty. Subsequent circulars enhanced these provisions on divorce, and reformed many other aspects of the law relating to a wide range of subjects such as maintenance, consent in marriage, custody of children, protection of property of minors, waqīf, and inheritance.
Discussing the motivations for these reforms the author takes the position that they were largely of internal origin and inspiration. She has little sympathy for the view taken by some western writers who are too apt to ascribe the inspiration for such reforms in Muslim countries to westernization and secularization.

"An important point to make is that the perspective of this study is that the development of the Sharia in the contemporary Sudan has been, for the most part, a matter of internal evolution. The greater number of European scholars of Islamic law hold the view that various changes in the applied law are the direct result of positive, secularizing, progressive, modernist contact with the West."

She considers it important to emphasise that even though they have taken place during the period of foreign rule, "these developments have taken place within the confines of a dialogue that is basically internal to Islam" and "the motivation for reform has been inspired as much by internal developments as by Western influence."

To support her position the author searches for and finds sufficient motivations for these reforms in the internal social and political circumstances of the Sudan. One of such circumstances was the agitation of political groups such as the women's movement, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Communist party. There is again the increasing economic difficulties in the country, the problems relating to family maintenance created by migrant labour, the growth of a capitalist economy, the weakening of the extended family, and the trend towards according a more central role to the nuclear family.

Not only does the author see the motivations for reform as internal to the Sudan, but she also considers the methods of reform to be "for the most part Islamic". because "legitimate means" were employed such as takhayyur, Ittihād, Siyāsah shar'īyyah, talḥīq and maṣlahah.

The point which the author is making in this respect is a significant one. It is so easy and natural to see a connection between contemporary reforms of Islamic law and the atmosphere of foreign domination, westernization and secularization in which they were effected. There is a clear desire by the author to downplay the significance of such connection, at least in the case of the Sudan. She proceeds on the assumption that her purpose may be achieved by showing that situations internal to the Sudan necessitated, or at least motivated such reforms, and at any rate methods "legitimate: in Islam were used.

It is not a wholly satisfactory argument though, since it still leaves open the question whether "Westernization" may not be the
factor behind those very "internal circumstances" which motivated the reforms. As to the use of legitimate Islamic means to effect the reforms, there is no doubt that there is a difference between the existance of legitimate means of effecting reforms and the correct employment of those means.

All this of course means that the point will remain debatable for a long time. But by unveiling the social, economic and political conditions under which the Sudan effected its own reforms the author has certainly made a valuable contribution to that debate.

This particular feature of this book, rare in the available literature on the subject, of presenting the details of how the Islamic law operated in practice in the Sudan and the condition under which it operated is one of the book's valuable assets. Not only are the detailed rules of the Shari'ah, according to the traditional Schools presented, but the author has enlivened her discussion of the dry details of the laws and their reformed version by her account of the practical application of these laws in the Shafi'ah courts in cases and proceedings which she observed herself.

In this book the author has fairly succeeded in her aim of presenting a study which rises above the prejudices and ethnocentricism for which much orientalist writing is criticised. It is a study which is less judgemental of Muslim society and more sympathetic to internal development in Muslim countries. It is written in a language which is likely to be more acceptable to Muslims.