Surely the answers to questions such as this are of interest to the secular historian. Also, it seems to me somewhat arrogant to treat the major features of people’s religious beliefs as “symptoms” of something else, even if this something else is “underlying social phenomena” (p. 179). Having said all of this, however, I do think that the author makes useful and perceptive points about Islam. For example, I think that she is probably right when she says that much of what is preached as Islam is “the ‘urf (customary law) of the countryside” (p. 183).

I have said at the beginning that this is a very interesting book. It is not, however, a book for the novice but is meant for a reader with considerable knowledge of modern Egyptian history. The author sometimes alludes to items without providing the background that a beginner would need. For example, she mentions “the Taḥrīr project and its ensuing crisis” but does not explain what exactly “Taḥrīr project” is (p. 142). The reforms of family law pushed by Jehan Sadat are said to have been “passed” when in fact they were promulgated by decree (pp.184–85). A potentially interesting discussion of the relationship between contemporary veiling and marriage problems fails to spell out all the links a beginner would need (p. 203). The book presents a wealth of information which is of considerable value to the knowledgeable scholar, but this very wealth of information could be confusing to the beginner. Some chapters are structured in such a way that the wealth of information tends to obscure the over-all arguments. (This seems to me particularly true in the last chapter, which in places reads like a catalogue of problems but which also presents the author’s most important thesis.)

These criticisms, however, point mainly to the defects of virtue. I believe that this book will stand as a major contribution to scholarship on modern Egypt, both for the recent scholarship it incorporates and for the distinctive theses it presents and the new directions it maps out.

William Shepard

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The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington have galvanized interest not only in the militant Islamic groups but also in the Muslim
populations in the Western countries. One consequence of these attacks has been growing incidents of harassment and victimisation of the Muslims in many Western countries including Australia which are grounded in ignorance of Islam and Muslim communities. This timely volume provides a well written and informed overview of the Muslim population in Australia which is estimated to be around 300,000. It also provides solid evidence that Islam is now an integral part of Australia’s religious landscape.

The book contains contributions from several prominent academics. It highlights the ethnic and social diversity of Australian Muslims and their distinctive contribution and challenge to Australian multiculturalism. The eleven chapters cover a range of important topics. The contributions by Bilal Cleland, Michael Humphery, Gary Bouma, Joan Daw and Riffat Munawar provide an excellent overview of various aspects of Muslim settlement in Australia. Cleland’s historical survey details how the process of Muslim settlement was shaped by the prevailing political attitudes and national policies. In his contribution Humphery argues that negotiations of “Muslimness” in multicultural Australia is an essentialising and homogenising encounter in which the diversity of Muslim culture and identity is ignored.

Bouma, Daw and Munawar’s chapter on “Muslims Managing Religious Diversity”, examines how the experience of multiculturalism has been conducive to managing religious diversity of Australian Muslim community “in a way that has promoted a high level of good will and established a foundation for harmonious and productive relationships among a variety of religious groups and between Muslims and Australian society” (p. 71).

The following two chapters deal with Muslim women. The contribution by Samina Yasmeen is based on her study of settlement needs of Muslim women in Perth and examines the distinctive character of Muslim women’s needs and how these are mediated by class, religious and national identities. It is argued that insensitivity towards the social needs of Muslims women act as a barrier to their access to full citizenship rights. These conclusions are further supported by Zahra Kamalkhani’s contribution about the settlement problems faced by recently arrived Muslim refugee women.

The chapters by Irene Clyne and Christine Asmar deal with Islamic schools and the role of Muslim Students Association as vehicles for affirming Islamic identity. The contribution by Jamila Hussain provides an overview of the problems arising from the application of Australian Family Law to the Muslim families and urges Muslim communities’ participation in the process of law reform. The chapter by Abdullah Saeed provides a case study of Islamic banking in Australia.
In his well documented study of Australian media’s coverage of Islam, H.V. Brasted shows that Islam has received a “very bad press” due to stereotypical representations of Islam as a religion associated with political turmoil, fanatical leaders, and patriarchal social organisation. The concluding chapter by Shahram Akbarzadeh explores the diverse ways of constructing Muslim identity and their implications for the future of Australian Muslims and for Australian society.

This volume makes an important contribution to our understanding and knowledge of the Muslim communities in Australia and should be of interest to anyone interested in Australian Muslims and multiculturalism. The editors have done an admirable job in assembling a very knowledgeable group of contributors. The book is, however, disappointing in one respect. It lacks a critical analytical perspective in exploring the cause of the deeply entrenched antipathies of mainstream Australia towards Islam and Muslims. These have been noted in several contributions but not discussed and analyzed anywhere.

These antipathies have surfaced in public after the “Tampa crisis” and September 11 attacks in the Unites States. One of the great historical ironies is that one of the final acts of the Australian Parliament in 2001 was to enact a draconian Border Protection legislation. Some will argue that it reflects the same kind of racist anxieties which in 1901 led the first Australian Parliament to introduce the Immigration Restriction Act and laid the foundation of the White Australia policy. Let us hope that the new legislation will not lay the foundation of a damaging racist policy which, among other things, will not only undermine Australian multiculturalism but may turn out to be especially against the asylum seekers most of whom in recent years have come from predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East and South Asia.

Riaz Hassan


Of all the attention-getting slogans in Central Asian tourism, none is so ubiquitous as the famed “Silk Road”, to which every cultural article from