
This collection of short scholarly excerpts of both insiders’ and outsiders’ voices, sewn together under broad chapter headings, intends to introduce “the enlightened general reader, as well as the interested specialist” (p. xii) to the multifaceted realities of Islam. Rejwan, research fellow at the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, hopes to show “that viewing Islam as being uniform and monolithic can result in confusion and miscomprehensions and, ultimately, in conflict” (p. xii).

Broad in scope, the book includes chapters under the headings: “The Uniqueness of Islam”, “The Islamic Establishment in Decline”, “Islam and Orientalism”, “The Anthropologist’s Approach”, “Coping with Modernity”, “Islam Misunderstood”, “Islam and the *Dhimmi*”, “Fundamentalism Strikes Back”, “A Last-Ditch Stand”, and “Unity in Islamic Diversity”. Under these chapter headings, Rejwan presents between eight and twelve excerpts of scholarly writings per chapter, ranging in size from less than a page to several pages. Each chapter is prefaced with a brief introduction by Rejwan; these introductions themselves are also heavily suffused with long quotations, leaving overall little room for Rejwan’s own perspective.

While the limited length of these selections oftentimes leads to the danger that the reader might miss the larger context of the original writing, the selection and arrangement of the excerpts is at times also somewhat indiscriminate. Rejwan’s collection features altogether ninety-three short excerpts written by sixty-one different authors. That Gustave von Grunebaum’s work, some of which was written more than half a century ago, should lead the list in terms of frequency is surprising; likewise, one is astonished to find Rejwan’s own work featured so prominently, second in frequency only to that of von Grunebaum. On the other hand, other, more prominent, authoritative voices on Islam, both Muslim and non-Muslim, are either wholly absent from the collection, or mentioned merely in passing. Rejwan’s selection of excerpts of primary Muslim voices is furthermore markedly slanted toward the greater Middle East. Regrettably, the collection includes little material from elsewhere in the wider Muslim world, with the notable exception of a few excerpts of Southeast Asian voices from *Shar'i'ah, Law and the Modern State* edited by Norani Othman. The chosen materials thus do not reflect the fact that the vast majority of Muslims live outside the
greater Middle East, where a much greater variety of expressions of living Islam can be encountered.

The arrangement of chapters is likewise awkward. The most basic historical background to Islam is not provided until chapter seven, while challenges of modernity have already been discussed in chapter five. Likewise, the selection of materials for individual topics is also at times problematic. The chapter on anthropological approaches, for example, only tangentially deals with anthropology proper, and furthermore draws to a large extent from Grunebaum’s rather outdated *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* (1955), neglecting much of the more recent anthropological work on the veritable variety of practiced “Islams” in different parts of the world. Similarly, Rejwan’s treatment of Orientalism is somewhat disorganized, as the issue is skirted in the chapter “Islam and Orientalism,” which features only one brief excerpt from Said (pp. 76ff.), but crops up again in later chapters, where Edward Said’s seminal book is mentioned (pp. 108ff. and 138ff.). At other times, excerpts gathered under a particular chapter heading are much more narrow than the title might suggest. The chapter “Coping with Modernity,” for example, focuses in the main on political realities of Arabism, Nationalism and understandings of the *ummah*, to the near exclusion of the larger issues of the relationship between politics and religion, the lasting effects of Western colonialism, economic development, and gender relations, to name but a few. An altogether regrettable oversight is the absence of a chapter on women and gender in Islam, as here again there would have been ample opportunity for the author to challenge misconceptions about a monolithic Islam, an excerpt of Amina Wadud Muhsin’s work in Rejwan’s chapter on fundamentalism notwithstanding.

The book’s main value lies probably in introducing the many faces not of Islam itself, but rather the many voices of scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, talking and writing about Islam. The author thus is being true to his secondary intention of showing “the variegated ways in which it [Islam] is viewed” (p. xii). Yet even in this capacity, Rejwan’s work is of limited value. While the author’s selections do include materials on the broader discussion of misconceptions about Islam in general, and Orientalism in particular, even here the selection and arrangement is somewhat slanted. Edward Said’s work is excerpted only once rather briefly, while both Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes get a disproportionate amount of exposure. Whereas Rejwan does in several places throughout the book address the intricate problem of Western misconceptions about Islam, his comments on the subject are rather disappointing: “While a few of the charges and criticisms leveled at Western Orientalism in general seem appropriate enough, the bulk of them are patently
unfounded, motivated as they were by political considerations and religious bigotry rather than by objective scholarly concerns” (p. 63).

Rejwan continues to argue his case against the “bulk of them” by discussing three somewhat marginal critics, namely Karam Khalla (whose book Rejwan fails to cite), Abdul Rahim Hasan, and Khalil Samaan. Foregoing professional courtesy, Rejwan rebukes Samaan’s criticism with terms such as “assault” and “savage” (p. 63), and, almost on the verge of an *ad hominem* attack, remarks that Samaan “still has no substantial book to his name (p. 64)”. In a later discussion, Rejwan seems to shift the responsibility to solve “the intensity of the prejudice against Islam” (p. 109) to “Western-educated and Western-oriented Muslims” (p. 110). Still later, Rejwan observes that “one of the topics about which Islam can justly be said by its defenders as having been misunderstood is that of its alleged affinity to communism” (p. 139). Although this last remark is written in an attempt to explain Bernhard Lewis’ mistake on this particular subject, together with other comments by Rejwan, the reader gets the impression that the author does not fully appreciate the wider context of a critique of Orientalism. Rejwan fails to notice that the bulk of charges against Orientalism, brought forth by its many critics, lies precisely in the fact that Orientalism was able to produce the very stereotypes and essentializing tendencies which produced miscomprehensions of Islam as being monolithic and static. In other words, Rejwan’s own attempt to challenge with this book such misconceptions is the outcome of a critique of the very Orientalism he seems to intend on defending. Yet throughout the book, Rejwan himself does not stay clear of the Orientalists’ essentializing generalizations. Thus one finds Rejwan discussing in undifferentiated fashion “the Islamic view of society” (p. 86) and one wonders what precisely Rejwan has in mind when he claims that “(t)he Qur’ān is the Holy Book of Islam in exactly the same way (sic) as the Hebrew Bible is the Holy Book of Judaism” (p. 158) and at the same time describes, in a rather offensive fashion, a “strict, orthodox attitude toward the Qur’ān ... as ‘a cult of the text’” (p. 180). Rejwan’s claim that “the educated, conscious Muslim believer [tends to] vacillate between fanaticism and unbelief” (p. 211) is likewise highly problematic. A number of grammatical and typographical errors (see for instance, pp. 18f, 21f, 38, 49, 108, 212 and 278ff.), as well as inconsistencies in transliteration (pp. 19, cf. 34 and 49), factual errors (for instance, pp. 38, 81 and 114) and incorrect or incomplete references (for instance, pp. 57, 108 and 263 [ch 5, n.1]) detract from the overall value of the book. While Rejwan’s attempt to dispel misperceptions of Islam as homogenous and monolithic is a worthwhile endeavour, the book does fall short of its goal.

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