the Muslim world and he demonstrates how Sufism as a metaphysical tradition is able to play a more prominent role in overcoming the misunderstandings between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds respectively. Anyone who wishes to familiarize himself/herself with Sufism will find Schwartz’s style and presentation generally very pleasing, uncomplicated and unambiguous. And it is basically a good read.

Muhammed Haron


Studies on gender in the former socialist societies in Central Asia have been on the increase after the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991. The present anthology intends to cover an unexplored issue, namely what impact the economic and political changes have had upon social transformation in general and upon social stratification and culture in particular in these societies. Various contributors to the book discuss social processes going on in the transition from planned economy to a market economy. The book even deals with another unexplored issue: Turkey’s strong historical link with Central Asia and Caucasus and its sharing of cultural and religious trends with this region. That Turkey has recently re-established these ties through economic entrepreneurship, student exchange programmes, migration, etc., makes the link between these regions even more pertinent.

The focus of the study is gender, thus the methodologies and theoretical framework are taken from a gender studies perspective, in both the two points on which the anthology is focused: economic development on the one hand, and religious, educational changes as well as changes in the family on the other.

The first part deals with the transformation of the economic system in the former Soviet states and the impact this transformation has had on gender. Lourdes Beneria indicates how the economic transition has disempowered women in these societies. As women in the region had, to a great extent,
already attained equal legal rights as men and equal possibilities to education and to labour opportunities, in the transition to market economies, patriarchal forms have been restored, female unemployment has risen, and women’s employment tend to have been transferred into markets of “cheap labour.” Benaria takes her starting-point in the notion that these societies had previously built on collective norms and women were less individualistic and selfish and more nurturing than in societies with market economy. She poses the question: will the introduction of an economic system built on “Western individualism” change this: “Is market behaviour undermining what has been called ‘women’s ways of seeing and doing’?” (p. 15). Although Benaria is careful not to essentialise gender, in her suggestion of economic systems built on feminist models, where society should be organized according to “non-hegemonic conceptual/theoretical tools and models” and economic activities should be placed “at the service of human development” in order to “increase collective well-being” (p. 19), a dualistic view of gender differences is anticipated. But it is even possible to read her suggestion, not as promoting a “female” attitude, but rather as a profound criticism of market economy and its consequences on the societies in transition in the former Soviet Union and the Caucasus.

Valentine Moghadam observes how the re-emergence of the patriarchal system plays a role in the disempowerment of women in the transition to a new economic system. She indicates how in an economic system of competition women tend to falter behind. Distinguishing between the state of women in Central Asia and Caucasus and of those in Turkey, she believes that in Turkey women will benefit from the reform process in contrast to women in the two other regions. Meltem Dayıoğlu’s study on women and education in Turkey shows that it is very much due to the lower level of women’s education that their employment rate is lower than men’s. Dayıoğlu’s study is not comparative but but it raises the question of how there seems to be a propositional development in women getting into the labour market as women get education in Turkey, whereas in Central Asia and Caucasus, as Benaria and Moghadam point out, women used to have opportunities in education similar to men but with the introduction of the market economy women tend to fall out despite their high educational standards. This question is unfortunately not answered in the book.

In the part dealing with the private domain, gender roles and marriage are discussed mainly with reference to the so-called Turkic societies and communities. The first two articles are based on quantitative data, and the authors analyse the results of surveys conducted in Turkey, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. The third and last study is based both on quantitative and
quantitative data collected in Turkmenistan. All of the societies and communities in this second section are based on patrilineality and patrilocality, and at least the last study deals in detail with the consequences ensuring from these factors for Turkmen women. Whereas the two first articles discuss gender relationship within marriage, types of marriages and perceptions of happiness versus unhappiness in marriage within the framework of social factors, such as class, rural-urban background and educational standards, the third study unfortunately does not take these aspects into consideration. This is unfortunate as the authors Sharon Baştug and Nuran Hortaçsu, have also written the first article in the section, and would thus have the necessary quantitative data which could have been used in the third article. The effect is confusing: does the presentation cover all classes and women with various educational levels? With this said, the article is an important study of how patrilineal descent and patrilocality has created a system where women’s roles as wives and mothers far supersede the role of daughters. Thus women’s ability to give birth to boys is an important factor in measuring a woman’s value. The family elders cannot rely on support from the daughters, neither financially nor in terms of their future caretaking. There seems, however, from the description of bride-price (money or property paid to the bride’s parents) and dowry (money or property paid to the bride) as practised in Turkmen society, the possibility for the family to obtain some material good from the daughters. The ambivalent system of bride-price and dowry is portrayed and indicates a complicated system which in some cases might leave room for nuclear couples to break free from the traditional patrilocality. The analysis of how the marriage is a rite-de-passage in various stages for the newly-wed woman is excellent.

Olcay İmamoğlu shows in her article how modern love marriages have started to replace the traditional arranged marriages in Turkey, particularly in urban areas. In the first article by Sharon Baştug and Nuran Hortaçsu, they deal with marriages and women in three Turkic capitals, Ashkabad, Baku, and Ankara. They discuss how socio-political differences have an effect on women’s status and role in the family in the three societies. Interestingly enough, based on the result on marriage patterns in the three societies with various degrees of industrialisation, Baştung and Hortaçsu conclude that “the relationship between industrialization, individualistic values, and romantic love and freedom of choice as the basis for marriage may not be true for non-Western society.”

The third section in the book discusses the experience of social changes in a historical perspective. Azede Ayse Rorlich discusses how Muslim reformers in the Russian empire before the Russian revolution promoted the notion of
gender liberation. The liberation of women was reflected in journals published by Muslims. Despite this the Russian colonialism in the pre-revolutionary years built on “orientalistic” ideas of civilising “the exotic other,” i.e., the Muslims, in terms of liberating women from oppression. Nükhet Sirman discusses, through the reading of novels, how the Turkish nationalist discourse in the late 19th century in the aftermath of the modernising reforms (tanzimât) was built, to a great extent, on the dethroning of the father. She claims that love in these novels “did not function as a way of constituting companionate marriage, but served to delegitimize the structure of hierarchy among men in the household and in society at large” (p. 163). The strict hierarchic household with older men as head of the household, with men of lower status being dependent on the patriarch, became contested in this wave of new social ideas. Liberation of women was, however, not an issue in these novels, where passive and obedient women were approved of. Farideh Heyat writes about the transition from traditional female roles to women becoming professionals after the Russian revolution. Heyat notes that even though women became professional, traditional cultural notions about femininity and women’s behaviour lingered on.

The last part of the book deals with gender and identity construction. Collette Harris shows that there is a discrepancy between the “ideal” submissive role of women and the “real” less submissive role within the home. The Soviet regime’s attempt to “emasculate men and defeminise women” (p. 207) might be a reason for this discrepancy. Collette believes that it is a strategy for Tajik women to give their menfolk the possibility to feel like “real men.” She also points out that the tension between the “ideal” and the “real” female role has created a conflict which in the post-Soviet period is increasing.

The two articles on Uzbekistan deal with women’s role in general and women’s role in the construction of national identity in particular. Ayşe Saktanber and Asli Özataş-Baykal claim that Uzbek women’s everyday practice in the mahalla with Islam starting to play a greater part in everyday life is part of a formation of an Uzbek national identity. Dilarom Alimova and Nodira Azimova have conducted an ethnographic study on Uzbek women’s organising of rituals, and they analyse how women transmit traditional values through these rituals. In the article on Azerbaijan, Nayereh Tohidi looks into the relation between gender and national identity. Her study is politically oriented, and she highlights three major political trends in Azerbaijani identity politics; Turkism, Islamism, and Azerbaijanism. Interestingly enough, in Azerbaijan as distinguished from several of the other countries in the region, Islamism is less influential. Seteney Shami’s anthropological study deals with North Caucasus and like many of the other authors she analyses the
tension between women’s traditional role and the new professionalism enforced by the Soviet regime in view of social customs, such as for instance rituals and domestic hierarchies.

The importance of studying these geographical areas is due to the rapid social change this region has lately gone through. Moreover, an important aspect is the phenomenon, common to most countries in the region, of equal opportunities for men and women being enforced by the state whereas traditional gender roles remain in the private sphere. It is, however, pertinent to point at that the book was written in 2000. In view of the enormous development in most fields of life in this region during the last decade this book is an important background study for research on the continuous process of social change in the region.

Anne Sofie Roald


During the last fifty years of the 20th century, the Arab world has had the good fortune of having a leadership that dominated the contemporary events and also left a huge legacy, both good and bad. Personalities like Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir (d. 1390/1970), Yasir ‘Arafāt (d. 1425/2004), Hāfiz al-Asad (d. 1421/2000) and Faysal b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 1395/1975) shaped the history and destiny of the Arab world and became legends in their own lifetimes. Regrettably, the tradition of scholarship and erudition in the region has been weak, and hence their achievements have scarcely been recorded by the Western media and historians. The most important issue around which these leaders, mostly contemporaneous leaders, fashioned their politics is the Palestine issue.

The Arabs, despite all the facts on their side, failed to arouse understanding and sympathy of the world powers regarding the plight of Palestinians. In an age of mass communication and information revolution, the Arabs have remained far behind their adversaries. Consequently, their cause has suffered by default. There are only a handful of journalists honest