

Mai Ghousseub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds. *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Middle East*. London: Saqi Books, 2000. pp. 294.

This is a collection of articles that makes a valuable and much needed contribution to the field of Islamic/Middle Eastern sexuality studies. This field includes such classic works as Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer's *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992) and Murray and Rosco's *Islamic Homosexualities* (New York: New York UP, 1997). Like these works, Mai Ghousseub and Emma Sinclair-Webb's project is also concerned with sexuality, yet its scope mostly involves the sociocultural construction of masculinity in the Middle East. The selections feature a variety of approaches to male identity as they deal with traditions and cultural institutions from the Arab, Jewish and Turkish Middle East. While the articles explore the formal sites and the intricate processes through which exemplary masculinities are constructed, the book as a whole wisely resists attempts to generalize or standardize the rituals of masculine formation. Instead, it delves into the complex dynamics of the local and in the process challenges notions of fixedness and 'authenticity.'

Mai Ghousseub and Emma Sinclair-Webb do not limit their selections to one particular mode of critical exploration. Rather, they attempt a combination of approaches. Interviews and autobiographical narratives from journalists and novelists who come from and work on the Middle East are validated by this collection and treated as systems of knowledge. I find this kind of approach quite agreeable. Some of these authors' work appears in English translation from the Arabic making this work accessible to an English-reading public that would otherwise have little opportunity to become acquainted with it. Apart from opening up these works to this reading public, this publication rediscovers the literary quality of interviews and autobiographical narration. In fact, based solely on the English text, I found the translations to be quite successful as they flowed smoothly and eloquently, completely devoid of that stilted quality that occasionally marks a translation.

In this book, therefore, the theoretical, the biographical, and the creative become the vital tools of exploration into how masculinity is created in a geographical region that has been a source of endless political and cultural controversy, unrest and tragic conflict. Significantly, as Emma Sinclair-Webb notes in her Preface, the theme of violence permeates the first section of the book – something that the editors had not anticipated but that ul-

timately makes an important contribution when trying to understand the formation of certain masculinities in the Middle East.

The book's three main sections explore different aspects of the male experience. The first section, "Making Men: Institutions and Social Practices," develops its theme through a chronological progression from childhood to adulthood. The five components making up this part of the book include an extract from Abdelwahab Bouhdida's classic work *Sexuality in Islam*, first published in French in 1975. The excerpt discusses circumcision rituals in Tunisia and Morocco up to the early 1970s. Incorporating Bouhdida's excerpt in the first chapter marks a gesture of acknowledgement of an existing tradition of writing about Islam and Arab culture and also places this collection in this tradition. At the same time, the project's expanded format (the various chapters of this first section include an interview, a case study, and a novel extract) is quite effective in exposing the harsh realities of contemporary, cultural and international politics in the Middle East. This exposure has a further function: it substantiates the theoretical formulations through immediate and often quite tragic depictions. As a result, events such as the beatings of Arab youth in Lebanon and the fighting in Southeastern Turkey are used to determine valuable and significant theoretical conclusions regarding political, cultural and sociological determinants of masculinity.

The book's middle section comprises of five essays and is entitled "Male Fictions: Narratives, Images and Icons." These essays involve discussions of masculine images from the Egyptian film industry, modern novels, classical folk tales and the Iraqi press. The discussion of male homosexual characters in *Modern Arabic Literature* by Frederic Lagrange is particularly interesting as it demonstrates how, through their very deviance, homosexual acts help to assert the nature of acceptable, honourable and 'real' masculine identity. This section also includes a truly superb article by Mai Ghousseb on the portrayal of women in the "chaotic quest for a definition of modern masculinity," (234) and Hazim Saghieh's strong reading of Saddam Hussein's tyrannical portrait that dominates the Iraqi media with its rigid, sterile masculinity (Saghieh's article is translated from Arabic).

Yet the book's most memorable section is, perhaps, the final one, "Memoir and Male Identity" with a strong current of nostalgia running through the narratives. This is a nostalgia that does not merely satisfy an aesthetic decorum but communicates a powerful and even moving engagement with social institutions meant to transform a male child into a 'real man.' In the autobiographical story, "Lentils in Paradise" by Moris Farhi, a novelist and activist born in Turkey, the young male protagonist relishes the overwhelming experience of voluptuous feminine beauty in the women's hamam (Turkish

bath) during his regular visits there with Sophie, his nanny. Redolent with sensuality and eroticism, the story is rare in its appeal. Equally noteworthy is Hassan Daoud's also autobiographical treatise on the cultural meanings attached to the moustache, that unmistakable and indispensable sign of virility in a number of Middle Eastern societies.

Coming from Cyprus and having a special interest in gender politics, I found this collection of essays particularly enlightening, appealing and exciting to read. Having served in the Cypriot army, I felt compelled to read Sinclair-Webb's superb article on military service in Turkey. Having had a grandfather who was greatly proud of his moustache, I found Hassan Daoud's contribution to be one of the several moments in this collection that had me absorbed and moved. I think this book will quickly become an important reference. Finally, I appreciate the politics of two female editors bringing out a collection on male identity in the Middle East. As Emma Sinclair-Webb rightly points out, working on women also means working on men, and "[f]ocusing on masculinity should not be seen as a shift away from feminist projects, but rather as a complementary endeavor, indeed one that is organically linked" (8).

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George C. Jacob, ed. *Encounter and Identity: Perspectives on Indo-Canadian Studies*. New Delhi: Prestige, 2001. 207 pp. Rs. 400.

This volume of twenty-three essays comes out of the International Seminar on Canadian Studies held in January 2000 at the Centre for Canadian Studies at Union Christian College in Alwaye, Kerala. Similar volumes such as *Canadian Studies: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Creative Books, 1998) indicate keen interest in Canadian Studies by young Indian scholars, who offer valuable comparative perspectives on the two countries' shared colonial and postcolonial experiences, however diverse. The main themes of the essays in this collection are cultural identity (tellingly, the word "identity" appears in the titles of more than half of the essays) as well as "encounters of the colonial, migratory, cross-cultural, constitutional, multilingual, and many more kinds" (Preface). Overall, the book is a laudable effort in engaging with the concerns of both nations with multiculturalism and multilingualism, the changing status and role of women, first-nation peoples' rights (Tribals' rights in India), and even postcolonial writing strategies in general.