

**Shattering the Stereotypes:
Muslim Women Speak Out**

Fawzia Afzal-Khan, ed.

Northampton, MA: Olive Branch, 2005

338 pp., \$20 (paper)

With the proliferation in the aftermath of 9/11 of popular, and sometimes injudicious, volumes on Islam and the Middle East, the present anthology, edited by Fawzia Afzal-Khan, is a welcome addition in that it is an academically well-informed project that addresses the general public. That the task of responding to neoconservative disparagement of Islam should foreground gender issues, as does this volume, is eminently justifiable. The way in which the construct of “Muslim Woman,” whose perceived oppression is allegedly evidenced in the veil, is made to metonymize the backwardness of a whole region, hence justifying neocolonial incursions, is what motivates endeavors such *Shattering the Stereotypes*. Yet, the paradox of this anthology is that it largely succeeds in modifying stereotypes against the grain of one of the terms proposed in the title, namely, *Muslim Women*. Although the plural in the title does suggest a contestation of the monolith Muslim Woman, the anthology nevertheless risks operating from within the terms of discussion dictated by Western neocolonial discourse. Nawal El Saadawi, that arch-secular feminist, does well to sound a note of skepticism-cum-apologia in her foreword. She writes that the “word Muslim or Islam on the cover of any book makes it a bestseller. I am critical of religious languages, or turning the political-economic and social conflicts into religious conflicts. But this book . . . corrects the distorted image of Islam in the Western countries. It clarifies that Islam is not the cause of terrorism or backwardness or oppression of women” (x).

While reservations can be made about some omissions, the anthology’s ambition is clearly to attest to as much heterogeneity of identities, positions, and genres as possible. In addition to the foreword and the editor’s introduction and afterword, the anthology comprises some forty-seven texts in six sections: “Non-Fiction,” “Poetry,” “Journalism,” “Religious Discourses,” “Fiction,” and “Plays.” The sound inclusion of two texts by African-American Muslim women—Eisa Nefertari Ulen’s essay “Tapping Our Strength” and Atlanta-based Nadirah Z. Sabir’s columns

written in the wake of 9/11 (together with reader responses)—serves to nuance the nexus of Islam, gender, and power by exploring the specificity of the double oppression experienced by African-American followers of the faith. Moreover, the inclusion of a text by a non-Muslim Middle Eastern woman—Christian Palestinian-American playwright Betty Shamieh’s “Chocolate in Heat,” a powerful series of interconnected monologues of Arab women and men resident in the United States—is justifiable not only “because it shows that the issues that are so important in the work of the Muslim women included here are not ‘Muslim’ issues alone [but] are rooted in the conditions of global injustice and oppression,” as the editor puts it (16), but also because it hints toward the often occluded religious diversity of the Middle East.

It is possible, of course, for a specialized reader to navigate the anthology in longitudinal sections, tracing, for example, articulations of the Afghan predicament across such texts as Nadia Ali Maiwandi’s essay “9/11 and the Afghan-American Community,” which delineates the shifting schisms in the community and its growing activism as a result of 9/11 and its consequences for Afghanistan; Zohra Saed’s “Fragments from a Journal,” in the genre of firsthand testimonies about 9/11; Wajma Ahmady’s “My Earliest Memories,” about the experience of exile from Afghanistan; and, if in a different register, Bina Sharif’s one-woman play “An Afghan Woman,” an eloquently anguished monologue on the complex plight of Afghani women at the colonial crossroads, critiquing the uses and abuses to which the burka has been put. In the same vein, one might trace articulations of American-Palestinians’ plight across Rabab Abdulhadi’s “Where Is Home? Fragmented Lives, Border Crossings, and the Politics of Exile,” which deftly brings out the interconnections, through a pastiche of diary entries dispersed across time and continents, between their dispossession after 9/11 in the United States and their experience in the Occupied Territories, Israel, and Lebanon, and in some superb American-Palestinian poems such as Suheir Hammad’s “first writing since” and Nathalie Handal’s “Baladna,” “War,” “Rachel’s Palestinian War,” and “Detained,” among others. But such a longitudinal reading practice would miss part of the cogency of assembling these texts by different women from the region, whereby the

Comparative Studies of
South Asia, Africa and
the Middle East

Vol. 26, No. 1, 2006

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specificities of their experiences, once set alongside each other, bear witness to and oppose the broader picture of American hegemony. This is the condition of “economic lopsidedness of a top-down, winner-take-all globalization . . . [the] egregious example [being] the state of Israel—supported unequivocally by the USA militarily and economically to serve as its watchdog and policeman in the Middle East whose oil resources continue to fuel . . . its imperial interests,” with the unwitting co-optation of patriarchal Muslim discourses, as Afzal-Khan puts it in her essay “Unholy Alliances: Zionism, U.S. Imperialism, and Islamic Fundamentalism” (20).

The polyphony that an anthology brings makes, in this case, for a fine-tuning of constructs such as “Muslim Woman” or indeed of simplistic reading of feminism as articulated by women who are Muslim. For her part, Mino Moallem provides a thoroughly subtle interrogation of the category/label of “Muslim Woman” as it operates within the Enlightenment’s legacy of civilizational binarism that continues in neocoloniality, and in the attendant slippages of complicity in postcolonial orientations within the academy. “Am I a Muslim woman?” she asks in conclusion. “Even to answer this question is to enter the discursive spaces of race and gender in the conditions of postcoloniality . . . I am faced with the impossibility of transgression since either I am required to submit to the ‘itinerary of silencing’ by refusing to answer the question or to adopt a subject position that makes me ‘pass’” (55). In the afterword, the editor sounds out the playwrights she has anthologized on whether anyone of them would identify herself as “Muslim Woman Playwright” and elicits a range of responses that are virtually consonant in their “desire to distance themselves from what they perceive . . . as the confinement of labels, while being aware of the need for representation” (327).

Despite their different stances, one distinction compellingly made by the three contributors to the section “Religious Discourses”—Azizah al-Hibri, Riffat Hassan, and Mohja Kahf—is between the basic precepts of Islam regarding women’s rights and their culturally articulated (mis)interpretations that have privileged patriarchy, this being the starting point for feminist reinterpretations. Al-Hibri gives a rich reading of Islamic law that demonstrates “that problematic jurisprudence was often the result of a misunderstanding or misapplication of the Qur’anic text resulting from . . . patriarchal bias” (160); nevertheless, the way she positions herself is problematic. She suggests that being “an American Muslim woman” she is “unburdened by patriarchal assumptions, [hence having] a distinct advantage over earlier interpreters [of] the Qur’an” (164) as

well as an interpretive edge over “Muslim women in other countries” (meaning in the Middle East) who are “being hindered . . . by patriarchal forces in the name of Islam . . . [and] by an authoritarian structure of governance” (163). She thus elides various historical trajectories of feminism located in the Middle East (the network “Women Living Under Muslim Laws” being just one source on contemporary examples) about which one would have liked to see an especially commissioned article in this volume.

As it is, however, the anthology does gesture toward such trajectories and suggests connections between Middle East-based and diasporic feminisms among Muslim women. There is Maryam Habibian’s “Forugh’s Reflecting Pool,” an adaptation for the theater of the life and work of Iranian feminist poet Forugh Farrokhzad (1935–67). There is Anisa Mehdi’s account of the variegated ideological stands on Islam and gender among Muslim women and men—including the Malaysian Zainah Anwar, who challenges entrenched patriarchal interpretations of the Koran and advocates a reinterpretation that brings out women’s rights and advantages—met while she was preparing TV documentary work, such as “Muslims” for the PBS program *Frontline*. And one should mention the spectrum of Pakistani positions suggested in an interview with Pakistani-American Riffat Hassan concerning her critique of Pakistan resident Dr. Farhat Hashimi, a conservative who espouses veiling, and Asma Jehangir, a secular human rights activist, in favor of what she proposes as a renewed hermeneutics of the Koran that proceeds from the “ethical criterion” (186) that God is just and hence calls for a rejection of interpretations that have perpetrated injustice.

Finally, this book deserved closer proofreading and would have benefited from a glossary and an index. Also, in view of the anthology’s orientation toward a general readership, a list of further references to consult on issues raised here would have helped. That said, however, there is no doubt that the texts assembled in this volume make a valuable contribution toward countering reductive hegemonic images of women of the region, moving them from being objects of a neocolonial gaze to being subjects of their own resistant discourse. A number of the texts are likely to make their way into courses on topics as varied as autobiography, Near Eastern studies, gender studies, transnationalism, and globalization.

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Al-Ahram Weekly

DOI 10.1215/1089201X-2005-016

International Education Systems and Contemporary Education Reforms

Adel T. Al-Bataineh and Mohamed A. Nur-Awaleh, eds.
Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005
xiii, 178 pp., \$45.00 (cloth)

In all countries of the Third World central planners agree on the need for bigger and better educational efforts. A good educational system can shore up the fragile self-confidence of embattled elites, and it can distract from whatever other catastrophic events or trends—political, economic, or cultural—may be going on or that threaten to appear on the horizon. In addition, education is supposed to inculcate those skills that will help the population develop an industrial, processing, and diversified agricultural economy, as well as to produce a modern nation of dedicated citizens from a population of peasants who have small experience and understanding of civic, consensual, or mobilization politics. A less charitable way of putting this is to say that education can produce the kinds of citizens political leaders want, believing the sorts of things that will make it easier for the leaders to lead.

Statistical surveys document the achievement of these objectives (though the statistics are often more fanciful than factual), detailing the number of school-age children in school, the availability of instructional materials, and the rate of literacy. When compared with other, less tangible aspects of Third World rural and town life, village and town schools and universities are institutions that are conspicuously organized, related to the national matrix in definite bureaucratic ways, and subject to central-planning efforts.

But it is a mistake to think of educational systems as static. They are subject to changing demographic and economic conditions, and they are also subject to the various kinds of reform movements that are periodically generated by educational thinkers and planners. The main goal of *International Education Systems and Contemporary Education Reforms* is to assess and shed light on some of these attempts at reform. The editors, Adel Al-Bataineh and Mohamed Nur-Awaleh, have assembled ten chapters that take aim at issues of reform from a variety of policy angles and in widespread geographic locations.

Rick Breault sets the stage by arguing the need for historical context in any examination of reform. He outlines the series of educational reforms from 1945 to 1960 in the United States as a necessary prelude to understanding reforms of the past twenty years. Moving farther afield, in their chapter on Morocco, Abdechafi Boubkir and Abdenour Bouksamhi stress the importance of a multi-

plicity of actors in moving a traditional educational system off its base. They emphasize the need for not just the government but also civic society more generally and the private sector specifically to become involved. They conclude that the reform under consideration in Morocco—the National Charter for Education and Training—will be successful because of its widespread support. In Morocco and in Guatemala there has been a shift toward more democratic educational systems. Martha E. Mantilla discusses the ways in which a centralized, urban, dominant-culture system in Guatemala has been transformed into a more decentralized, rural, and Mayan Indian-oriented one. In the process top-down discussions and procedures have been replaced by bottom-up and side-to-side communication. Darrell P. Kruger juxtaposes both history and contemporary developments in his discussion of Curriculum 2005, South Africa's ambitious and essentially standards-based new educational program. The contrast between apartheid education and that being currently proposed could not be more pronounced. It is a sea-change challenge to bring about such dramatic changes in such a short period.

Ghana is one of the oldest independent nations in Africa. Laura Dull therefore has well over half a century of educational development and reform to consider. She looks particularly at teacher education, noting that some 9 percent of Ghana's annual education budget is funded by international donors. One of the biggest educational concerns has been with "discipline"—in the classroom, certainly, but also out of it, in the culture at large—the need for honesty, hard work, and social and political stability. These are values that need to be inculcated in the schools. The attention paid to special education can be an important diagnostic criterion in assessing a country's educational policies. Al-Bataineh and Majedah Abu Al-Rub intensively examine the availability of special education in Jordan. Although severe handicaps, such as visual and hearing impairment, have been considered in the development of special education programs for some time, learning disabilities as such have been slighted. The authors urge an increase in resources for such children.

A basic issue—economic, political, and philosophical—that any country has to face, regardless of state of development, is the balance between public and private schooling. Whereas in earlier times the state considered a monopoly on education to be a moral imperative, more recently the growth of private-sector schools has filled the gaps that states have not been able to fill because of tight financial constraints. In two chapters, Mohamad A. Nur-Awaleh and Said Yasin deal with this issue. The first concentrates on the general problem regard-

less of country. The second looks at the curious case of Haiti—curious because it is almost unique in its mostly private school system and, despite its recurrent political instability, because its urban enrollment rate is extremely high. It has also shown a long and steady history of educational innovation.

The case of Kenya shows that a country's educational system is subject to the impact of powerful global forces. Fredrick M. Nafukho, Winston Jumba Akala, and John K. Rugutt show that Kenya's deteriorating teaching quality and enrollments are attributable to the demands of structural adjustment loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Part of the problem has been the application of a cookie-cutter model when much more culturally specific models are called for. In the final chapter Temba Bassoppo-Moyo and Vivien Mweene Chabalengula examine one of the more recent and technologically advanced reforms: distance education. Using South Africa as a case study, they conclude that distance education has clear advantages, such as increasing accessibility of education, but it has not yet gained the respect and acceptance of students, teachers, and administrators. Perhaps it is a good idea whose time has not yet come.

One of the book's strengths is the broad range of issues and areas of the world that it covers. Yet there are curious gaps. One of the most far-reaching educational reforms in recent times consists of the growth of madrasa schools in many Islamic countries. No development holds greater importance for education and current political developments worldwide, yet they are not mentioned. Similarly, it is curious that the chapter on Guatemala does not mention the convulsive civil war that has raged there for years, profoundly affecting the Indian populations that are discussed. My general impression is that the studies collected here are so oriented toward professional educational issues that they sometimes fail to take into account the larger cultural contexts in which they occur.

The book is full of grammatical and typographic errors, and its availability in cloth at \$45 makes it an unlikely choice as a classroom text. This is unfortunate, since the book will be of interest to those students interested in discovering how educational issues and problems can vary so dramatically from one country to another and particularly how the success of reforms depends so heavily on the geographical and cultural contexts in which they occur.

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DOI 10.1215/1089201X-2005-017

Child Labor in Sub-Saharan Africa

Loretta E. Bass

Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004

vii + 212 pp., \$49.94 (cloth)

Loretta Bass addresses the historical and contemporary factors that account for a disproportionate number of African child workers. In view of sub-Saharan Africa's poverty, and the fact that many children do not have access to primary and secondary schools, Bass argues against the criminalization of child labor because children must work and contribute to their family's budget. According to the author, "child labor becomes a social problem when researchers, policy makers, and the media begin to frame it in this regard" (10).

Bass adopts a culturally sensitive perspective and a microanalytical approach in her identification of child labor activities in specific African countries. Bass wrote that this text was based on her ethnographic fieldwork including informal interviews on the subject in Senegal during the 1990s. However, a clearer description of the author's methodological approach and research procedures is needed.

In chapter 2, Bass explains how various factors have influenced and shaped child labor, including Africa's long history of very young children working in agricultural and domestic work; Africa's triple religious heritage of Islam, Christian religions, and traditional African religions; postcolonial class and ethnic inequality; urbanization, industrialization, capitalism, and the consequences of structural adjustment policies. Children's early work exposure was to aid in their character development. The author describes the historical development of Islam and colonialism in Africa. She discusses the encountered difficulties of destitute rural Muslim male children who are engaged in begging work on the streets in Africa's urban centers in exchange for an Islamic education. According to Bass, the most exploited Muslim boys are those who are routinely disconnected from their parents. Europe's colonial rule of Africa and its impact on exploitative child labor are discussed. Bass indicates that "throughout Africa, colonial governments sought to use children in mining and commercial agriculture, and even separated children from their parents" (32). In postcolonial Africa, young children continue to provide unpaid work in plantation and commercial agriculture. Equally significant for the author is the devaluation of female labor and feminine work. Children's work is also devalued because it is perceived as "an extension of, and subordinate to women's work" (24).

In chapter 3, the author deals with several disparate themes. While noting that several sub-

Saharan African countries have reduced their child labor rates, the author emphasizes that lower wages in rural areas are associated with an increased rate of child labor. The author argues that Africa's poverty will not be reduced without debt forgiveness. She also provides several examples of undemocratic African leaders who appropriated foreign loans for themselves and their families. Moreover, loans have been poorly managed or stolen by leaders and other workers. These activities have contributed to the underdevelopment of the African masses who are unfairly burdened by debt repayment. Bass indicates that debt repayment demands and structural adjustment policies have made it quite difficult for African governments to fund schools, social services, and health care adequately. Bass cogently argues that most "African countries have strong societies but weak states" (56). In this context, there is primary identification with one's ethnic group, which can engender ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and power struggles over natural resources and undermine children's life chances. The democratization of African nation-states in the postcolonial era is also discussed. The author also mentions the HIV/AIDS pandemic that has created millions of orphans who are responsible for working to provide for siblings and elderly grandparents. Orphaned children's lack of education tends to place them at risk of being infected with the HIV virus. The author also discusses the strengths and limitations of laws by sub-Saharan African governments, the United Nations, and other international institutions to limit child labor. She insists however that laws "making child labor illegal may criminalize the child laborers rather than protecting them, therefore pushing children deeper into clandestine work situations and lowering their standard of living" (68).

In chapter 5, Bass indicates that urbanization and capitalism influenced a shift from a subsistence economy to the emergence of wage labor in Africa's urban centers. The wage economy influenced the economic empowerment of women and has altered traditional views of children. According to the author, the wage economy has also engendered a shift from traditional lineage-based family forms to the nuclear family structure or partnership family unions. Parents in partnership marriages tend to live in urban communities and are likely to value formal education for their children. Some of these children might work and attend school. In contrast, lineage-based families are more prevalent in rural areas. A disproportionate number of rural children work in agriculture or agricultural activities because they are likely to live with low-income adults and must contribute to the family's welfare. Bass writes that rural children are placed with urban family

members to acquire trade skills and to receive religious and secular schooling or to assist the urban-extended family. Throughout rural Africa, the paucity of schools, poor-quality schools, the irrelevancy of education, school cost, early marriages, and the distance from home to school are constraints on school attendance and instead move children into work. Rural children from poorer families who are fostered to nonkin adults in urban areas typically work. Girls do domestic and vending work and boys engage with vending and apprenticeship work. The children's earnings are turned over to their parents and to their foster parents.

Chapter 6 deals primarily with Senegal's pervasive gender stratification, which disadvantages girls and women. The author discusses the history of African and Islamic patriarchy, which values males' economic advancement and marginalizes women's and girls' involvement in Senegal's economy. Bass expands on the exploitative nature of child labor in her discussion of unpaid girl maids. The author provides several useful and specific examples of the uncompensated work and low-wage earnings of girl workers. She underscores the general attitude that these girls are gaining valuable skills. She insists that while some rural parents might send their children to urban families for economic gain, other parents are concerned about their children's educational and social advancement.

In chapter 7, Bass elaborates on the relationship between the breakdown of Africa's traditional family and community bonds and children as soldiers, prostitutes, and slaves. She discusses the blatant and subtle forms of enslavement experienced by women, men, and children in Niger, the Sudan, and Mauritania, despite these countries' antislavery laws. She mentions that fostering disguises slavery in urban communities because enslaved Africans are presented as members of the family. She describes how freed and escaped slaves might experience more income opportunities and retain their earnings as a function of urbanization. She writes on the trafficking of African children, within and across national borders. Trafficked children are mostly from rural and farming areas and from mother-headed households. These children are involved with commercial agriculture, on construction sites, in domestic work, and in prostitution. Bass describes the role of parents, relatives, and guardians in the trafficking of children and the children's experiences on plantations and as domestic workers. Trafficked girls are known to be forced into early marriages. She also highlights the important role of African governments, human rights organizations, and corporate entities in curbing the forced labor of adults and children. Equally important is the growing num-

ber of African child soldiers, and children involved in various capacities as spies, minesweepers, messengers, guards, porters, wives, and sex slaves. She explains how children are involved in and affected by civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi.

Chapter 8 deals with the need to expand agricultural production and sustainable economic development in rural Africa, where the majority of Africans live. She concludes that the underdevelopment of Africa's educational infrastructure means that children will continue to rely on the apprenticeship system for their long-term economic stability. She recommends that African governments effectively address the pressing problem of the most exploitative forms of child labor and that member states of the United Nations reexamine child labor conventions to make them more relevant to the needs and wants of poor rural African families. I concur with the author's suggestion that funds should be distributed to needy families and on concrete projects to remedy poverty. She recommends regulation and oversight to improve the apprenticeship system and for girls to have access to this system and for them to be trained in shoe-making and tailoring and in other trades historically closed off to them. The author concludes that sub-Saharan African countries must be more fully integrated into the "modern global economy as equal partners" to improve Africa's economy, and to diminish child labor (189). The author writes that "child labor can only be mitigated through programs that make work and school complementary instead of mutually exclusive" (189).

The author's infusion of historical and contemporary dynamics to explain child labor, along with supportive data, and engaging narratives result in a very valuable text. Her innovative insights and well-thought remedies for child labor should prove quite useful to a wide cross section of scholars, practitioners, and public policy personnel.

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 DOI 10.1215/1089201X-2005-018

"Sicques, Tigers, or Thieves":

Eyewitness Accounts of the Sikhs (1606–1809)

Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh, eds.

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

xxxiv, 397 pp., \$27.95 (paper)

The editors of this attractive volume have done students of Sikhism and Sikh history the great service of collecting, in one place, European studies and translations that describe, analyze, and illuminate the early Sikh community. This fact alone makes the volume indispensable to college and university libraries that do not have access to the originals. The editors, perhaps unwittingly, have created a volume that maps out the process of the creation of colonial knowledge at its earliest stages: lack of confidence, reliance on local informants, the increasing European practice of translation, the proliferation of detail, the creation of fact through repeated iteration, and reference to older published work. However, the intent of Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh seems not simply to provide new and well-situated evidence for scholars interested in comparing or theorizing forms of colonial knowledge; instead, they seek to provide to a general audience evidence with which to construct historical narratives of the Sikh community *and* of the South Asians and Europeans who were their contemporaries.

A general audience, of course, would never find this book on the shelf of a local bookstore, and if such a reader did find it, references to unglossed non-English terms (for example, *panth*, *prasad*, and *masand*, in the introduction alone, not to mention in the "Glossary of Names") would quickly try the patience of most novice readers. So the real audience here is twofold: English-literate practicing Sikhs and professional historians of religion and society who have devoted a substantial part of their training and research to the Punjabi language and Sikh people. Curiously, the editors make little if any explicit discussion of the interpretive antagonism between the two groups that dominated scholarship and public debate on Sikhism and Sikh history in the 1990s. A glance at the bibliography shows that the editors chose to ignore both W. H. McLeod's foundational, if contestable, books from his long career and J. S. Grewal's contribution to the *New Cambridge History of India*, on the side of the academic professionals, and the more vituperative critiques, such as *Fundamental Issues in Sikh Studies* and *Ernest Trumpp and W. H. McLeod as Scholars of Sikh History, Religion, and Culture*.¹ Perhaps Madra and Singh wish to put

1. Most foundational are W. H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968); J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Kharak Singh, Gobind Singh Mansukhani, and Jasbir Singh Mann, eds., *Fundamen-*

tal Issues in Sikh Studies (Chandigarh, India: Institute of Sikh Studies, 1992); and Trilochan Singh, *Ernest Trumpp and W. H. McLeod as Scholars of Sikh History, Religion, and Culture* (Chandigarh, India: International Centre of Sikh Studies, 1994).

these contests behind them, and their frequent use of the sources to challenge Sikh “tradition” on specific aspects of Sikh history suggests the possibility of constructing new and challenging old narratives without appearing to threaten communal or doctrinal cohesion. However, this volume is very much the product of several centuries of contest over the written representation of Sikhs and Sikh history, and the editors should have addressed this inheritance more directly and explicitly in their introduction.

This contest over representation may be explained as having four overlapping periods. First, the writings of members of the early Sikh community exhibited enough slippage on theological and historical points to permit later scholars to support arguments about the existence and antagonism of heretical groups. These discussions of theology and community continued throughout the eighteenth century. Second, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, imperial chroniclers and other authors serving political interests outside Punjab began producing first fragmentary accounts of the political impact of the Sikh community and then increasingly coherent narratives of the origins of Sikhism as a religious ideology. The European accounts included in “*Sicques, Tigers, or Thieves*” must be understood as falling in this period and as the inheritors of the earlier Mughal chronicles. They all attempted to do the same thing, namely, to create knowledge about a distinguishable body of people that could be used to maintain or establish political control over that group. This period, of course, would include the district gazetteers, army recruitment manuals, and other documents produced by British authors at the height of empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the early twentieth century, though, authors connected to or commissioned by Singh Sabha organizations had begun to contest imperial knowledge, engendering a third period of contest over representation. As the government’s use of social engineering raised the stakes for clarifying social categories in nineteenth-century Punjab, Sikhs formed Singh Sabhas to set down in historical and literary publications an official and measurable standard by which to measure an individual’s membership in the Sikh community. This had the intended effect of laying down for subsequent generations the content of what Madra and Singh call “tradition.” Fourth, McLeod’s *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* in 1968 introduced the analytical language of hermeneutics, philology, and critical evaluation of evidence characteristic of historians of religion in the mid-twentieth century. Such a direct assault on tradition generated a defense that initially was inchoate but ultimately learned the language of academic argu-

mentation by the mid-1990s, lashing out at all scholarship that recognized the intellectual debt owed to McLeod’s critical foundation.

These defensive pieces rejected critical method but adhered closely to rules of evidence to identify “errors” and reveal the ostensibly anti-Sikh, Christian proselytizing, or even atheistic “bias” of academic authors. It is difficult for someone who has read these pieces to understand Madra and Singh’s search for and exposition of errors in the early European texts included in this volume outside the context of the 1990s debates. William Francklin, for example, “not un-typically confuses Banda Bahadur as one of the Gurus” (185). Robert Orme, in discussing the merchant Omichand, does not merely err but rather “descends into polemics” (55), and the editors suggest a more thorough examination of the papers of Francis Xavier Wendel may enable future scholars to “gain a better comprehension of the Jesuit view of the Sikhs” (12). Is the reader to understand inaccuracy or error simply as the consequence of bias, or are there other possible explanations? And given the paucity of evidence and the history of fact formation in the Sikh tradition, how is one to know what is a fact and what is an inaccuracy? These questions, so central to the 1990s debates, lurk persistently beneath the prose of the editors as they introduce each piece.

The editors make clear, by their organization of the volume, that the bias of the author trumps chronology as the key to interpreting these early European texts (xix). This certainly may be a legitimate editorial policy, but to use it without identifying the historiographical context to which it is indelibly linked is intellectually irresponsible. Such a shortcoming should not diminish the respect due the labor involved in assembling and editing the documents collected. Any institution that aspires to an adequate collection of source material for the study of Sikhism and Sikh history should include this volume in its library, because of the importance of these documents to constructing thorough theological analyses and historical narratives.

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DOI 10.1215/1089201X-2005-019

Measuring Democracy and Human Rights in Southern Africa

Henning Melber, comp.

Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002

(Discussion Paper no. 18)

49 pp., \$15.95 (paper)

In the past fifteen years, a significant number of African countries have taken noteworthy, if sporadic and halting, steps away from authoritarian rule. This is an encouraging trend. But the fragility of these emerging democracies raises serious questions about how to gauge their prospects for democratic consolidation. One crucial question is how firmly committed African citizens themselves are to the development of democratic values and institutions. Recently, a number of empirical studies, spearheaded by the Afrobarometer survey project, have set out to measure African attitudes toward democracy. The essays in this collection contribute to this work.

The essays converge, from different points of entry, on the relationships between violence, democracy, and development in the transitional countries of southern Africa. Each tries to illuminate a particular aspect of African political cultures and its implications for democratic development. The essays are short and, given the paucity of reliable data, exploratory in nature. They are designed to stimulate new, more refined, research questions rather than to draw definitive conclusions. In this endeavor they are quite successful.

The first essay, by Joao Pereira and Yul Derek Davids, examines ordinary Mozambicans' attitudes toward democracy, how they define it, and how satisfied they are with their experience of it. Drawing on national and comparative surveys, Pereira and Davids find that Mozambicans tend to support democracy strongly (74 percent—the highest in the region); that they tend, realistically, to regard Mozambique as “a democracy, but with major problems”; and that they tend to define democracy overwhelmingly in terms of civil liberties and personal freedoms rather than electoral regularity or quality-of-life measures. Placed in a cross-national regional comparative framework, their analysis produces some intriguing findings with important implications for development strategies. For instance, they find substantially stronger support for democracy among Mozambicans than among South Africans (60 percent), even though South Africa has a more developed economy, a more urbanized population, and a larger middle class, all characteristics that analysts generally view as positive for democratic development. The difference is therefore significant. For explanation, Pereira and Davids point toward

Mozambique's long and painful civil war, as well as the postindependence government's authoritarian policies. But both countries have long histories of racial oppression and authoritarian rule, and both emerged at much the same time from extended civil conflicts. It turns out that South Africans tend to assess democracy in terms of economic rather than political benefits. What accounts for these different assessments, which surely will affect the ways these countries respond to democratic change? More research is needed.

The second essay, by Christiaan Kuelder and Dirk Spilker, focuses on Namibia and sets out to identify systematic patterns of support for democracy among young citizens (18–32 years old). Surveys suggest that support for democracy in Namibia is not very strong (57 percent), and Kuelder and Spilker find that attitudes among youths fall into two clear clusters of “democrats” and “nondemocrats.” These clusters break along an urban/rural divide, as well as income and education level (a divide that is particularly strong in rural areas). As Kuelder and Spilker note, these findings raise a powerful challenge for the consolidation of democracy in Namibia: the strongholds of democratization are urban, but most young voters are rural and thus live in areas that are less likely to produce democrats. Does this mean that Namibia's nascent democracy is doomed? Much depends on what motivates the splits between democrats and nondemocrats and on how intractable these splits are. Kuelder and Spilker do not offer any hints.

In the third essay, Guy Lamb shifts the focus toward the state, comparing the propensity of security forces in Namibia and South Africa to commit human rights violations on the view that the more security forces are able to act with impunity, the less likely a government is to move toward meaningful democracy. In both cases, Lamb finds the state's culture of accountability to be weak. South Africa, however, has a much stronger commitment to protecting human rights. Lamb ascribes this difference tentatively to the transitional governments' different approaches to addressing past human rights abuses: South Africa faced the issue squarely through its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whereas Namibia tried to draw a curtain on the past. If he is right, Lamb's analysis carries important implications for countries emerging from conflict: they must find effective ways to confront their histories of institutionalized violence. But, as he notes, the analysis is not comprehensive. In particular, questions of *why* security forces commit human rights abuses and how to assess the watchdog role of nongovernmental organizations require more extensive analysis.

These are provocative essays that not only generate systematic data on African political attitudes and democratic values but promote fruitful cross-national comparative analysis on the cultural and institutional environment for democratic consolidation in contemporary Africa. As such, they advance a new and important research agenda that places African ideas at the center of development analysis. In their current form, these essays offer questions rather than answers to the meaning of democracy in southern Africa. At the same time, they invite scholars to move beyond an appreciation of citizens' attitudes to a closer analysis of their motivations. It is a promising beginning.

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DOI 10.1215/1089201X-2005-020

**The Case for Palestine:
An International Law Perspective**

John Quigley
Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005
360 pp., \$79.95 (cloth), \$22.95 (paper)

There is no conflict in the world today whose solution is so clear, so widely agreed upon, and so necessary to world peace as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
—U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan,
Beirut, March 2002

John Quigley aptly calls it “the longest-standing conflict in the history of the United Nations”—the apparently intractable Middle East conflict that continues to foster violence and instability, not only in the region, but around the world. But Quigley's revised and updated *The Case for Palestine: An International Law Perspective*, in clear language and persuasive legal argument, draws the conclusion that it is not unsolvable. Far from an intractable problem, Quigley argues, solving the Israel-Palestine conflict in a way that leads to a just and lasting peace is not a difficult proposition. A just and lasting solution, however, would have to be based on the recognized rights of those who live there, rather than driven by the power politics that continue to erode the possibility of permanent peace.

Quigley's book is a dispassionate, objective review of the key legal principles and rights underlying the Palestine-Israel conflict. The book layers the legal analysis over each critical historical event of a half century of conflict in the region, peeling away

the myths of each event and substituting what is now the acknowledged historical-legal record. Quigley's review of historical events begins with the origins of Zionist claims on Palestine, the political maneuverings and formidable organizing that Zionist forces used ultimately to displace the British with Jewish control of Palestine, and the Zionist machinery put in place to cleanse Palestine of its native population. At each juncture of this early history leading to all-out war in 1948, Quigley examines the legal positions of the respective parties, their efforts through the United Nations and elsewhere on the world stage to promote those positions, and the political machinations that dispensed with legal rights at the barrel of a gun. Since the guns were, from the start, in the hands of the Zionists, and later the Israeli forces, the dispossessed Palestinians—mostly unarmed, totally disorganized, and without effective leadership—were doomed to be defeated in their struggle to maintain control of their land and their country. Quigley's review of the early historical record, and the legal issues that were placed in the hands of the United Nations on the eve of war, is a critical foundation to understanding subsequent events and the ongoing competition by the stakeholders to the conflict over their rights. Quigley separates legally grounded “rights” from “claims” that, although zealously promoted, have no basis in international law.

Among the questions the book examines are the following: Is this a conflict between two populations with equal rights to the same land? Did the United Nations have the power to divide the land of historic Palestine into two countries on the basis of ethnicity/religion/national identity? Did the Arabs initiate the 1948 war against Jews in Palestine? Did the Palestinian refugees leave on their own volition, were they ordered to leave by their leadership, or were they forced to flee—and do any of these reasons preclude their right to return to their lands? Is there a legally binding right of return for displaced Palestinians? Is an exclusive Jewish state in Israel/Palestine legitimate under international law? Is there a Palestinian right to self-determination, and, if so, in what territory is that right to be fulfilled? Is Israel an illegal occupier of Palestinian territories, or is it engaged in self-defense from Palestinian “terrorism”? Do Palestinians have a right to armed resistance under international law, and, if so, does it permit violence against Israeli forces, settlers, or Israeli civilians?

Clarifying the primary legal issues at the core of this conflict for a nonspecialist audience is not an easy task, as the legal questions are complicated. Some of the questions do not have clear answers, and their resolution depends on which view of his-

tory one accepts as true. Perhaps surprising for most readers, however, is that most of the legal issues presented here *do* have conclusive answers, though the answers may not be widely known. Quigley parses the complex questions through straightforward analysis, based on authoritative sources. It is important for the skeptical reader to note that much of the historical record related by Quigley has been researched and uncovered by Jewish and Israeli sources, in addition to primary records from U.N. archives.

In this conflict, the importance of recognition and implementation of legal rights is an essential component for the success of any effort toward a comprehensive peace settlement for many reasons. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was internationalized from the start through the Mandate of the League of Nations, the imprimatur given by the United Nations to creation of the state of Israel, and the ongoing mandate in the United Nations over protection of millions of Palestinian refugees for half a century. Moreover, there is international consensus about the key rights involved: the illegality of the Israeli occupation, the illegality of the settlements, the right of Palestinians to self-determination, the rights of Palestinian refugees to a durable solution including the choice to return to their homes and lands, and the rights of all civilians on both sides to security and dignity.

Finally, only international legal principles can find broad acceptance among stakeholders with widely divergent religious, ethnic, and national claims to the territory. Since World War II, the global community has increasingly turned to international law developed through the United Nations and its human rights treaties and mechanisms to provide the basis for resolving conflict and finding lasting solutions on the basis of legal criteria. Quigley's book highlights the enormous chasm between these carefully developed and agreed-on universal legal principles applied in so many other conflicted regions of the world, yet so obviously missing in efforts to negotiate a peace in the Middle East. Quigley succinctly reviews the prior failed efforts for a negotiated peace in his chapter "Oslo via Madrid," making the point that none of these efforts were structured on the basis of a recognition of legal rights and hence were doomed to fail. Thus far, the record has been clear: Israel, backed by the United States, has dictated that politics and claims, rather than legal rights, will be the only framework for the kind of peace it will accept.

Yet, as Quigley weighs the competing rights and interests of the Jewish and Palestinian populations from a legal point of view, it is quite clear that the Palestinians are the principal rights holders on

most of the critical issues involved in this conflict. Quigley's careful recharacterization of the myth that this is a religious conflict to the reality that it is an existential one over who has rights to the land of Palestine puts into perspective the key issues of property, refugees, and self-determination that must be understood and resolved for a permanent solution to be found. *The Case for Palestine* sets out, in clear and readable fashion, why international law is not just theory to be debated by academics, but a concrete set of rules, and a framework for rights, that transcend the contentious religious and ethnic demands that have defined the Israel-Palestine conflict in this small but highly explosive region of the world. Quigley's book distills complex legal theories, peels down to the essential legal principles involved, examines the various arguments made about the application of the principles, and draws conclusions supported by the weight of legal consensus: a significant contribution to a field in which so much of the literature is seen as promoting the bias of one side or another. Quigley makes a convincing claim that if the framework could be changed from a demand for implementation of political claims to one of legal rights, there might be hope of a durable peace. A reader of this book should come away with the conclusion that a law-based framework may well be the single most important precondition for a lasting resolution of this "intractable" conflict.

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DOI 10.1215/1089201X-2005-021

**For the City Yet to Come:
Changing African Life in Four Cities**

Abdou Maliq Simone

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004

297 pp., \$84.95 (cloth), \$23.95 (paper)

Abdou Maliq Simone's *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* makes a major contribution to understanding cities of the global South in general and of Africa in particular. Through an extremely insightful narrative, this volume weaves together postcolonial literature, development studies, and urban planning to reveal the clash between the lived reality of African cities and the Western fantasies of urban planning and development. Seeing cities as purveyors of modernity and urban planning as a colonial field, Simone shows how particular assumptions and paradigms of development have been trying to shape African cities and how

those are resisted by the everyday practices of urban dwellers in Africa.

In short the thrust of the book is that African cities survive *despite* not *because* of their urban and development plans and that they should perhaps be understood as victorious examples of resistance: resistance against imposed urban fantasies of the West and its desired plans. “Normative” urbanization prescribed by urban and development plans in African cities do not recognize people’s complex resources for sustainable urban life—what elsewhere Simone calls “people as infrastructure.”¹ These plans, he argues, neglect people’s practices and their invisible but viable resources, networks, and activities that may indeed “act as a platform for the creation of a very different kind of sustainable urban configuration that we have yet generally to know” (9).

In *For the City Yet to Come* Simone argues that African cities are often presented by government officials, urban planners, and development workers as failed cities, as unfinished projects, and as something that was supposed to be something else. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall resonate with this critique, when they articulate that “Africa as a name, as an idea, and as an object of academic and public discourse is fraught,”² in ways that go beyond even Edward Said’s paradigm of orientalism. Africa, they write, is presented as such an extreme case of “otherness,” that is otherworldly, as apart from the world, irrelevant, and incomprehensible.

The Western models of development and planning interventions, Simone powerfully demonstrates in this book, are less about responding to the needs of urban dwellers than about making them governable. African urban dwellers (e.g., the informal traders, the shoe shiner, the cigarette seller, the boss boy that steers transport, the beggar, the car washer, and the food seller at the sidewalk food stand) are extremely innovative in making a viable living in cities and engage in remaking of the social and spatial formations of urban areas. They do this “in ways that no public policy or formal institutionally driven development agenda has yet to match” (168). But urban-planning interventions try to shut down these spaces and networks of survival, usually carried out under the guise of concern for health and sanitation, getting rid of loiterers, saboteurs, and racketeers. This is while the informal economy is the main source of livelihood for the majority of African cities, providing for nearly 75 percent of

basic needs (6), accounting for 42 percent of the GDP in 1999–2000,³ and employing a large proportion of the nonagricultural female labor force, which has grown from 38.1 percent in 1970 to 62.8 percent in 1990.⁴

Without romanticizing people’s informal economies, networks, and practices, and cognizant of the cutthroat reality and harsh competition that these processes involve, Simone posits that if cities of Africa are at some level working, then what needs to be asked and understood is how they are working. Having worked for decades with nongovernmental organizations as a consultant on concrete urban projects in Africa, Simone uses stories of projects in four cities—Pikine (Senegal), Winterveld (South Africa), Douala (Cameroon), and Jidda (Saudi Arabia)—to bring to light what is hard to keep track of, but that which keeps Africans surviving in cities. Through these case studies he shows how diverse urban inhabitants maintain a viable urban life without discernible infrastructures, policy frameworks, and institutional practices by which to do so. In these case studies where urban processes take on a life of their own, Simone reveals the limitations of formal and self-conscious efforts at development.

In Pikine, he studies the Project de Ville, a complex attempt to install a new process of community management to provide new spaces for public action and economic opportunities that will lead to new forms of collaboration among different types of residents in different quarters. In Douala, he follows the story of *La Nouvelle Liberté*, a public art sculpture assembled from discrepant, recycled, and fragmented resources installed in a central urban location. But this project resulted in intense contestation, indicating the importance of concrete images capable of valorizing specific local practices for making and managing the city. Winterveld is the story of a community in Peoria, South Africa, that could never truly cohere because of its “absurd history that did what it could to keep its various diversities apart” (134). Here Winterveld Community Crisis (WCC) took on a ghostly and yet omnipresent existence in ways that could never precisely be specified. In this story Simone shows how the consolidation of specific notions of what is urban and what is not is used as a basis to “govern” the community through specific interests to dominate the political and development projects. In Jidda, Simone examines the urban Africa extended outside the continent though the experience of African

1. Abdou Maliq Simone, “People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg,” *Public Culture* 16 (2004): 407–29.

2. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, “Writing the World from an African Metropolis,” *Public Culture* 16 (2004): 348.

3. Simeon Djankov, “The Informal Economy: Large and Growing in Most Developing Countries,” June 2003, rru.worldbank.org/Discussions/Topics/Topic18.aspx.

4. Lourdes Beneria, *Gender, Development, and Globalization: Economics as if All People Mattered* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 117.

migrant workers. Here traditional tools and social institutions are used that have long passed in urban Africa based on deeply rooted historical mobility in many West and East African societies.

For the City Yet to Come analyzes some of the critical social, economic, and historical conditions that have set the stage for the particular trajectories of urbanization experienced in these cities. The book underlines that “a wide range of provisional, highly fluid, yet coordinated and collective actions are being generated that run parallel to, yet interact with, a growing proliferation of decentralized local authorities, small scale enterprises, community associations and civil society organizations” (13). In this volume Simone tries to make sense of what otherwise appears simply as disparate and irrational dimensions of urban life.

What is unique and important about Simone’s contribution to understanding the changing urban life in Africa is the light it brings to the resistance in the local context. Unlike many studies of urban poverty and problems in African cities, Simone’s draws a more complete picture in that he frames people’s informal practices and networks not merely as coping and survival strategies but also as a “protracted struggle over the legitimacy of self-employment and of the right to survive in the city” (169). This book reveals the kind of struggle people engage in against official practices that objectify African urban dwellers and make invisible the relationships among them that are the source of life. “In the end,” Simone asserts, this is “a losing battle for the state.” African cities are a clear demonstration of “popular will, and of a coherent urban culture and urban citizenship, . . . [and of the] persistence of people to survive in the city . . . to revise and improvise informal activities and to put together the provision of a vast domain of foodstuffs, services, shelter, consumables, transportation, health care, and education outside of the institutions, frameworks, practices, and policies sanctioned by the state” (169–70).

As Western planning paradigms have continued the colonial administration processes in the “pushing of residents off the map” (176), African urban dwellers have persisted in the cities—not the cities imagined by the purveyors of modernity but those imagined and improvised by their inhabitants.

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DOI 10.1215/1089201X-2005-022

Raja Nal and the Goddess:

The North Indian Epic Dhola in Performance

Susan Snow Wadley

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004

216 pp., \$22.95 (paper)

Susan Snow Wadley presents a spirited translation and a carefully situated study of *Dhola*, a popular and engrossing epic performance tradition from rural North India, particularly Braj (Western Uttar Pradesh and eastern Rajasthan). Performed by men of various castes—Water Carrier, Shepherd, Farmer, and Leatherworker, for example—*Dhola* takes about forty nights to complete, with “the translated text from any one night running over one hundred typed pages” (9). Wadley’s innovative rendering of the epic is based on a six-hour narration by an expert storyteller, Raghubar Kachi, that she supplements with other episodes and actual words of singers. Although Wadley modestly says that she draws on recordings of “only twelve episodes,” her study is the synthesis of more than three decades of scholarship and engagement with the epic tradition that includes a study of oral and chapbook versions from different decades, performances by several troupes, commercially sold tapes, and in-depth interactions with the two performers profiled in the book. Recordings made over the years are archived at Indiana University and the American Institute of Indian Studies, New Delhi.

The story of Raja Nal revolves around his birth in the forest, far from his princely home in Narvar; his childhood as an adopted Merchant son; his marriage to the celestial Motini and later to the mortal Dument; and his tragic end with the rest of his family that includes his son, Dhola, and his daughter-in-law, Maru. Wadley finds that at the center of this epic, one that weaves itself around numerous human relationships often complicated by mistaken identities, the powers of goddesses and women, magic, and a social world identified by many castes, is a profound philosophical question: what does it mean to be human? The question is worked out through the travails of Nal who is constantly subjected to tests that challenge the limits of human endurance. Suffering banishment from his kingdom, leprosy, blindness, and “madness,” Nal is compelled to resort to many disguises that put him in the shoes of different castes and trades (Merchant, Acrobat, and Oil Presser). Wadley’s clearly written introduction prepares the reader for the rich story ahead by identifying key motifs in the epic: social order versus anarchy, devotion to the goddess Durga, powers of women especially in the realm of magical arts, identity as constructed by caste and status, and, finally, mortality itself.

Chapter 2 contains Wadley's rendering of *Dhola*, followed by a brief cultural and literary history of the epic and of Braj. *Dhola* is a fascinating conjoining of diverse cultural motifs and at least two well-known oral and written story traditions: Nala-Damayanti from the Mahabharata (the section of Nalopakhyana) and Dhola-Maru from a sixteenth-century Rajasthani Jain ballad. Wadley takes care to note, however, that performers and patrons articulate *Dhola's* literary and cultural connections variously. *Dhola*, she argues, also reflects the political times of late-seventeenth-century Braj during which it was most likely to have been consolidated. The epic's overt interest in the theme of "recognition as a king" parallels the rise in power of Jat agriculturalists who contested Rajput authority that was abetted by declining Mughal powers.

Wadley's brief overview of *Dhola's* foray into the commercial audiocassette market of the 1980s and later is extremely interesting. Audiocassette productions of *Dhola* show how *Dhola* continues to be adapted for wider audiences—not without critique from "traditional" performers—by substituting the *cikara* (stringed instrument) with the better-known violin, harmonium, or synthesizer; by engaging Hindi film tunes; and by delivering the story in urban dialects.

Chapter 3 gives an intimate sense of *Dhola's* performance as Wadley explores the performance styles and life stories of two "knowledgeable" and "passionate" singers with whom she has interacted for decades: Ram Swarup Dhimar of Mainpuri District of Western Uttar Pradesh and Matolsingh Gujar of Dhamari in Bharatpur District of Rajasthan (typos, however, variously place him in "Kama District" [65] and in "Ghamani" village of Bharatpur [xii]). In this chapter, perhaps Wadley's richest, she presents accessibly notated transcripts of each singer (with introductions to the other members of the performing troupe) to draw the reader's attention to the semantics and cultural associations of the distinct melodic patterns, speech styles, and regional song genres, all of which contribute to emerging meanings of the epic. Her analysis also highlights Ram Swarup Dhimar and Matolsingh Gujar's differing—deliberated—engagement with oral and written texts and with different musical instruments. The freedom to innovate is partly tied to the fact that "Dhola is driven by audience demand, not by ritual" (xii). Wadley very persuasively demonstrates that "not only do the aesthetic principles of written and performed *Dholas* differ, but the contrast between the performances of Matol's troupe and Ram Swarup's illuminate[s] some of the range of aesthetic possibilities of *Dhola* as performed" (91).

Chapters 4–7 interpret *Dhola*, a formidable task that Wadley conducts well since the epic is densely layered with symbolic social content. *Dhola*, Wadley shows, is moved almost singularly by feminine force: by the goddess Durga and by Motini and Dument. However, unlike Krishna-bhakti in the Braj region, which tends toward an erotic-love relationship between Krishna and his devotees, Devī-devotion as mirrored in *Dhola* regards Durga (but not Kali) as the fountain of maternal benevolence. Performatively, too, singers invoke Durga. Wadley finds that the epic upholds and celebrates female powers and women's choices that are not ordinarily visible in lived society. Another interpretive lens in the book is that of "caste." While one may differ with some of Wadley's ethnographic observations about the prevalence of caste in Indian (not only Braj) forms of self-identification, she convincingly shows that the epic—especially as Nal must metamorphose himself into varying caste identities—constantly compels an empathetic reconstruction of oneself as "other," and thus poses its metaquestion: what does it mean to be who one is? Wadley explores this question with regard to Nal's character in the final chapter of the book.

A further conversation I seek with the book relates to its understanding of "Sanskritic Hinduism." In order to fully appreciate one of Wadley's central points that *Dhola* challenges "the Hindu norms of a Sanskritic Hinduism" (92), one needs a more specific picture of what Sanskritic Hinduism means: What practices and texts (written, oral, visual, etc.), constitute Sanskritic Hinduism? Who patronizes them and when? Which other practices and texts are they oppositional to (or continuous with)? Noting that the epic's popularity in the religious consciousness of rural North India outstrips the popularity of texts like the Bhagavad Gita claimed by "British" and "elite" Indian scholars as being the "core of Hinduism" (8), Wadley says: "I thus challenge the reader to consider what our understandings of Hinduism would be had *Dhola* been among the dominant texts nominated by Western scholars as representing Hinduism. Would the pervasive understandings of women and of caste that dominate Western and elite Indian thinking about Hindu society be different?" (8). The challenge is an important one but we see that *Dhola* itself, as Wadley notes, both counters and affirms "core principles of Hinduism" (146) in several ways. For instance, Raja Nal's multiple caste transformations exist alongside the affirmation of his identity "as a 'true Ksatriya'" (146). Then, on one hand, *Dhola* (like many other narrative forms) robustly caricatures Brahmans, and placing them at the bottom of a moral hierarchy subverts the high place accorded

to them in many older Sanskrit texts. On the other hand, Wadley finds that notions of the body encapsulated in the Rig Vedic *purusa sukta* (which one might associate with a Sanskritic Hinduism) are reflected in Queen Motini's efforts to reconstitute her body into that of a female Acrobat (163). And *Dhola's* emphasis on goddess worship and female power is consistent with many salient Sanskrit formulations that place the feminine at the generative center of the universe. (Here, citing Ashis Nandy, Wadley calls this feminine orientation of *Dhola* "pre-Aryan," but to call this orientation non-brahmanical is somewhat problematic, because goddess worship is shared widely across communities in contemporary Hindu society.) Such examples highlight what seems to be *Dhola's* disavowal of any one ideological commitment, a disavowal that in fact indexes the complex relationships that exist between varieties of Hindu practice and thought—Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic, to use that classification—in everyday contexts. The question then becomes whether it is possible to sustain the analytical separation envisaged for centuries between a Sanskritic Hinduism and a non-Sanskritic Hinduism in light of the intricate connections practitioners make between multiple expressive forms in day-to-day life.

All of this is to say that the book opens up avenues for revisiting important broader dialogues, while presenting with warmth, verve, and contextual depth an understudied but popular epic performance tradition. Written lucidly, and with helpful appendixes, this book makes for wonderful course adoption.

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DOI 10.1215/1089201X-2005-023