

more completely captures complex dynamics associated with how, why, and to what effect nationalist narratives are “rescripted.”

One can understand why Brand included an epilogue about the so-called “Arab Spring,” but she missed an opportunity here as well. Her discussion of Algeria, which did not have an uprising, is adequate, but she has considerably more material on Egypt with which to work. Yet Brand oddly de-emphasizes her analysis on nationalist narratives in favor of a short run-through of events since Mubarak was pushed from power. She mentions the contested 2012 constitution and efforts to revise textbooks, but somehow overlooks or gives short shrift to the rich set of materials that the deposed former president, Muhammad Mursi, and now President ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi used in their efforts to reconstruct a nationalist narrative around the idiosyncratic ways the organizations they each represent—the Muslim Brotherhood and the armed forces respectively—understand what it means to “protect the revolution.”

Brand’s overall analysis and insights outweigh these shortcomings. For anyone in the broad analytic community interested in understanding how ideas and nationalist narratives intersect with elite efforts to ensure regime stability and legitimacy, *Official Stories* is a good place to begin. ✨

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AYESHA S. CHAUDHRY. *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law, and the Muslim Discourse on Gender.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xii + 258 pages, preface, acknowledgements, appendix, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$52.50 ISBN 978-0-19-964016-4.

Perhaps one of the most challenging verses for those seeking to establish gender justice on the basis of the Qur’an 4:34, dubbed “the wife-beating verse,” has long called for a thoughtful examination of its interpretive tradition. Ayesha S. Chaudhry skillfully takes up this daunting task, exploring both the historical and contemporary exegetical literature to present readers with a nuanced and contextualized understanding of a verse that calls for women to be disciplined should they exhibit signs of *nushūz*, commonly translated as disobedience/ rebellion.

The Introduction lays out the conundrum that motivates this study: How could the living example of Prophet Muhammad, who never hit his wives, be reconciled with Q. 4:34, understood by Islamic tradition, stemming from

“a mythic golden age in which Muslims ruled empires and commanded the respect of the world” (6–7), as divinely ordained evidence of men’s right to discipline their wives? And given that all humans are equal before God, why didn’t this mythologized and authoritative Islamic tradition instead *challenge* the right of men to hit their wives? The book tackles such questions through the framework of uncovering the idealized cosmologies Muslim scholars have developed both historically and in the contemporary era, and argues that while traditionally patriarchal, modern theories are increasingly egalitarian, leading to anxieties over fresh interpretations that are seen as “threatening the stability of the entire patriarchal order” (13). Focusing on Qur’anic exegesis and Islamic law as two disciplines highly relevant to the ramifications of Q. 4:34, the first part of the book comprises three chapters that explore the historical Sunni Islamic tradition in terms of 1) the multiple contexts of Q. 4:34; 2) the ethics of wife-beating; and 3) the legal boundaries of marital discipline.

Chapter 1 examines Q. 4:34 in the context of the verses surrounding it, and painstakingly uncovers the larger worldview within which the interpretive act took place through an examination of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *ḥadīth* literature to show that despite Muḥammad’s own “moral disapproval” (35) of wife-beating, exegetes upheld a man’s right to beat his wife in accordance with their historical and cosmological frame, which was unabashedly patriarchal. Thus, a polysemic verse such as Q. 4:34 is “profoundly influenced by the social and historical frameworks that surround the exercise of reading this text” (53).

The next chapter takes up the legal and ethical discussions relating to hitting wives, and here Chaudhry effectively argues that the framework for such discussions was provided by an idealized cosmology that was patriarchal in its logic and social assumptions. A careful examination of the technical terms of such discourse provides a nuanced perspective on legal and ethical deliberations, all conducted within a consistent frame of reference that “assumed that God prefers men over women, which results in husbands having moral authority over their wives” (93). The chapter is a tour de force in uncovering patriarchal logic and showing its many nuances. The third chapter in this first part then takes up the question of the legal boundaries of marital discipline to argue that “jurisprudential works addressed only the ramifications of extreme hitting, not the underlying right of husbands to physically discipline their wives” (97). The insightful and detailed examination of variances within the juridical schools shows the range of concerns even within a commonly held patriarchal worldview; for instance, while some were concerned with protecting the husband from

legal oversight in conducting marital relations, others insisted on such oversight so that the husband would not overstep his bounds despite his authority. Overall, the purpose of part 1 of the book is to subject the historical Islamic interpretive tradition, mythologized as indisputably authoritative, to a careful examination that uncovers its very human, socially and historically constructed assumptions, which in turn affect not only the ways in which verses are read and interpreted, but imbricated into social institutions as legal and theological dispensations, protections, and practices surrounding marriage and marital relations.

The second part turns to contemporary discussions and comprises two chapters, the first of which (chapter 4) examines a spectrum of positions on Q. 4:34, ranging from the traditionalist to the reformist, while the second (chapter 5) takes up the question of the struggle between idealized patriarchal (pre-colonial) and egalitarian (postcolonial) cosmologies. The Conclusion of the book engages the larger issue of whether the unquestioned authority given to the mythic Islamic tradition has become stifling for contemporary Muslims, and suggests that demythologizing pre-colonial interpretations (“the Islamic tradition”) through an examination of the tradition’s logic and assumptions, as indeed this book has so compellingly done, opens up generative spaces for the living community of contemporary believers “to advocate for innovative hermeneutical strategies that are responsive” to their concerns (223), such as eliminating violence against women. Overall, this book is a welcome addition to the growing literature contesting the hegemony of the historically bound interpretive tradition that bears testament to its rich discursive efforts, but ultimately argues that the task of interpretation is ongoing and must not be shirked. ✨

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MARY ANN FAY. *Unveiling the Harem: Elite Women and the Paradox of Seclusion in Eighteenth-Century Cairo.* Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012. xvii + 331 pages, acknowledgements, note on transliteration, photographs, tables, notes, references, index. Cloth US\$45.00 ISBN 978-0-8156-3293-1.

For those who believe that Muslim harem women were prisoners within an enclosed space in the house deprived of mobility, legal personhood, economic independence, and power, Fay’s study of the late Mamluk harem will be eye-opening. For historians of Mamluk-era Egypt, the value of Fay’s work lies in her revision of a male-centered scholarly narrative.