

solution lies in establishing a strong party system modelled after Western-style democracies. However, it is far from obvious how this could be achieved.

While generally very well written and easy to follow, the book has a few shortcomings. Key concepts such as “state,” “regime,” and “monarchy” are not sufficiently clarified. For example, Clark writes in the conclusion that “while the two states have withdrawn, their disaggregation has allowed a more direct route by which each monarch may engage in coalition strategies” (p. 283). What is meant here by “states”? The state bureaucracy? But if so, does this not contradict the earlier argument about appointed officials undermining elected (political) representatives at the local level? Similarly, the terms “tribes” and “clans” could be more precisely defined. Second, although the bulk of fieldwork for this book was conducted from 2010 to 2012, it is regrettable that the 2015 decentralization reforms in Morocco were not at least referred to; the Municipal Charter (Organic Law) of 2015 brought about quite some significant changes in the local planning process and it would have been useful to update some of the findings, especially with regard to the Municipal Development Plans. Similarly, the discussion on civil society in Morocco could have included some references to the growing grassroots protest movements made up of “unorganized” civil society, namely ordinary and mostly young citizens who do not represent the pro-regime civil society elite which has gained so much from decentralization reforms.

Despite these minor shortcomings, I strongly recommend this book to all students and scholars of local politics in the MENA region for its fascinating account of how power is reconfigured at the local level and what this means for regime stability. By giving voice to local leaders who are notoriously difficult to study, Clark has made a valuable contribution to the scholarly literature on decentralization, which still tends to be dominated by (a-political) macro-level analyses on the effects of decentralization reforms on public investment levels, economic growth, macroeconomic stability, or education and health outcomes, rather than grounded analyses of their actual practice.

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## Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family and Society. Zahra Ayubi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). Pp. 368. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780231191333

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Zahra Ayubi’s *Gendered Morality* is a brilliant analysis of the ways in which gender hierarchies are constructed in classical Islamic philosophy. The book is based on three key Persian philosophical treatises on ethics (*akhlāq* texts) that range from the 12th to the 15th centuries. They include *Kimiya-i Sa’adat* or *The Alchemy of Happiness* by Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111); *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* or *The Nasirean Ethics* by Nasir ad-Din Tusi (d. 1274); and *Akhlaq-i Jalali* or *The Jalalean Ethics* by Jalal ad-Din Davani (d. 1502). Despite the texts’ differing theological orientations and the authors’ varied social locations, all three of these treatises were written for an elite male audience. As such, Ayubi posits that these texts serve as exemplary illustrations of the ways in which Muslim male scholars constructed ideas of the self (*nafs*) based on principles of cosmic justice and wholeness, while simultaneously reaffirming a tenuous, restrictive and gendered humanity. The study masterfully weaves metaphysical, cosmological, and philosophical queries together, as well as social and anthropological realities of justice, social norms, and values.

The book is divided into four main chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter historically situates *akhlāq* literature, as well as Ayubi’s analytical approaches and methodological justifications. The main crux of the arguments are divided between Chapters 2 to 4, which are thematically organized across three central relations that are key for ethical refinement: that is the individual (metaphysical self), the self in marriage, and the self in social contexts.

The central philosophical texts here concern the role of the metaphysical soul (*nafs*) and the moral ethics that are required to refine the soul so that the one achieves the state of *khalifa* (viceregent) of God on earth. Of course, this potential for intellectual and ethical refinement was limited to men, as Chapter 2 makes known. In this regard, the male soul, which has the potential for self-refinement also seems to have power over those who are lesser souls. Here then, women are viewed as secondary tools to the goal of the male's self-refinement, but what about the refinement of females? Do they have this potential according to these ethicists?

According to these authors, though still human, women are inferior to men. They lack intellect and are overly emotional, a state that the male ethicists believe is divinely ordained. Women were often only discussed in relation to their roles in the domestic spheres. For instance, they are treated as biological objects in relation to their husbands, who are viewed as ethical (rational and spiritual) subjects, as discussed in Chapter 3. The latter dynamics are especially evident in discussions of child rearing and managing a home, and in marriage and divorce. Here then, the woman is seen merely as a tool for the development of a "rational masculinity." It is during such moments that the tensions between the inclusive humanity of men and women is affirmed, while at the same time a metaphysical ethical hierarchy of the masculine (over the feminine) is solidified. This gendered anxiety between hierarchy and equality, that is, the tension between power and justice, is a prevailing theme throughout Ayubi's discussion.

The final thematic analysis of Chapter 4 remains one of the most fascinating discussions of the book. Here, Ayubi problematizes masculinity as a static and stable category in philosophical discussions. Ethical treatises were invested in constructing the ideal male elite or the "ultimate-male," as these texts were painstakingly invested in how elite males were supposed to interact with men in private and public spheres (i.e., civic, court, community). The examination of same-sex interactions between males (or "homosocial relationships") were normalized as universal and the ideal, though such relations were available only to males who were of a particular social status, intellectual ability, and "ethical comportment." Ayubi found that it is not just the female that is marginalized by ethicists, but rather al-Ghazali, Tusi, and Davani all constructed a very narrow and particular elite male as the ideal ethical human being in a Muslim context, which not only reflects a particular misogyny, but also creates a hierarchy of masculinity that has been taken for granted.

In light of these findings, the conclusion calls for a feminist philosophy of Islam based on the potential for metaphysical "radical equality" that was highlighted throughout her discussion. The study successfully calls for a "philosophical turn" that must employ critical gender analysis when reading these texts not only in the context of Islamic philosophy, but more broadly in the study of Islam. Ayubi makes the case that such a critical and gendered analysis of ethical treatises are necessary, as opposed to totally disregarding their claims or ignoring these texts, because *akhlāq* literature provides a unique and critical lens for gender in Islamic studies. Whereas legal (*fiqh*), Qur'anic commentary (*tasfīr*), and other Muslim textual sources, have treated the women singularly, such as through negative tropes of sinfulness or sexuality. In *akhlāq* literature one finds that the ethicists had to contend with women's humanity (i.e., as part of creation) all the while negotiating and normalizing women's hierarchical and inferior location in society, particularly in relation to men. Still, this hierarchy was a process that needed to be defined and constructed. It is precisely the examination of this philosophical process in which ethicists constructed such norms that the author finds productive for furthering a feminist Islamic philosophy.

The book is impressively researched, written, and theorized, all the while being skillfully accessible and well structured. It models how granular textual analysis can lead to productive retuning of questions of gender that have been neglected in the field of Islamic philosophy and its implications for the study of Islamic social notions of gender, hierarchy, and egalitarianism. Ayubi has translated her primary sources herself from Persian with a gender critical lens for the first time, which proves to be one of the many valuable contributions of this masterful scholarship. It is also this textured analysis of primary sources that makes Ayubi's inquiry persuasive. All this is to say, that the book is a must read for scholars and students interested in Islamic philosophy and gender in Islamic studies. Individual chapters will serve as ideal teaching resources for courses on Islam, Islamic philosophy or gender and Islam, especially for primary source analysis. In unpacking these gendered and hierarchical dynamics around ethics

and comportment, Aybui has deftly applied feminist and gender analysis to deconstruct these ever-popular ethical texts.

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## **A History of the 'Alawis: From Medieval Aleppo to the Turkish Republic. Stefan Winter, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016). Pp. 328. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780691173894**

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The 'Alawis are considered a branch of Imami Shi'ism, today concentrated on the Mediterranean coast, between Adana in Southern Turkey and Tripoli in Northern Lebanon. Until the French Mandate over Syria, they were referred to as Nusayris, a term deemed pejorative today. In Syria, they represent an important portion of the population (11 percent) and have been the dominant minority controlling the state since the putsch of Hafiz al-Asad in 1970. The civil war raging in Syria since 2011 has awoken interest in the 'Alawis and generated an important literature concerning their history and their current role in state and society.

Stefan Winter's *A History of the 'Alawis* can be considered a convenient handbook, a chronological introduction to the history of the 'Alawis up to the French Mandate over Syria and the Turkish Republic (until 1936). It does not include the more recent history of Syria, but it points to the current fate of the land and its inhabitants.

The work is based on a new interpretation of traditional evidence and on the input of several new sources. Indeed, Winter had access to an original unpublished 'Alawi biographical dictionary which fed a recent new domestic historiography. It has been especially useful to him for approaching the interactions with Ayyubid and Mamluk leaders and with Isma'ili neighbors during the Medieval period. Winter has relied upon Ottoman fiscal censuses and registers of the shari'a court of Tripoli, French Foreign Office and Military archives, and those of the Turkish Republic, which open new perspectives on the 'Alawis in the interwar period.

Winter appears at odds with the common "metanarrative" concerning the 'Alawis. Throughout the book, he engages discussions against the mainstream historiography dominated by nationalist and sectarian prejudices. 'Alawis are generally presented as a marginal and persecuted branch of Islam, compelled to seek refuge in the mountains. The supposed obscurity of 'Alawism exerts a real fascination, which has led many to overemphasize the specificity and irreconcilability of 'Alawis with the Sunni majority of Syria. From the 18th century until the interwar period, the designation "Nusayris," has been often considered by Orientalists and missionaries a diminutive of "Nasara" (Christian), whereas it derives from a 9th-century Shi'i mystic and scholar named Ibn Nusayr al-Namiri. This misunderstanding has allowed some authors to imagine that 'Alawis were Christians who had been compelled to become Muslims but maintained Christian beliefs and rituals.

By reassessing the available sources, Winter sets the Nusayris in the Islamic context of their origins, in a time in which Shi'ism was a front ranking force in Iraq and Syria, without clear doctrinal and institutional borders. Chapter 1 outlines their roots within the intellectual context of Iraq in the period between the 9th and 11th centuries, in which Imami Twelver Shi'ism was not yet formed into a strict orthodoxy, and the *ghulat* (extremists) who deified 'Ali were not yet clearly identified and excluded. 'Alawism itself never completely defined the borders of orthodoxy and orthopraxy and remained open to conceptions and practices coming from Christian Gnosticism or Zoroastrism.

As has been demonstrated by recent anthropological work, it is in situations of competition and mimicry that communal borders are more clearly drawn. From the 10th century onward, the competition with