CSSH NOTES

Laura Briggs. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Reproducing Empire is an invitation to reconceptualize gender, sex, and reproduction as an analytical framework for understanding Puerto Rico. In this complex and multivalent work, Laura Briggs repositions ideologies of family, sexuality, and reproduction as central to U.S. imperial enterprises. In so doing, she focuses a powerful lens on how discourses of sex, science, race, reproduction, deviance, and domesticity have shaped and propelled U.S. colonialism, in both form and substance.

Moving from the 1890s through the 1970s, Briggs' ambitious work demonstrates how American institutions and government agencies have long been concerned with the purportedly deviant sexuality of low-income Puerto Rican women on the island and the U.S. mainland. She chronicles how this interest was manifest through the construction of an array of "social problems" that came to undergird and justify the American colonialist project in Puerto Rico. Thus, Briggs traces how popular notions of the dangerous, diseased prostitute and the allegedly dysfunctional structure of impoverished Puerto Rican families became essential to American intervention in the region. She also examines tropical medicine as an imperial science and its use in the construction of racialized bodies based on geography. Briggs goes on to reveal how the complicated politics and discourses surrounding overpopulation, reproduction and sexuality—as organized through debates over eugenics and birth control—operated as a dominant narrative for class and nationalist struggles.

Briggs' analysis, however, is not limited to the geographic boundaries of Puerto Rico, and she follows the post-war migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. mainland, specifically to New York City. Here, Briggs charts how theories of race, gender, and class, as articulated through the social sciences, became the primary staging ground for struggles over welfare policy and anti-poverty initiatives in New York and the nation as a whole. By linking the ascendance of "culture of poverty" theories to the ways in which ideas of Puerto Rican women's sexuality and reproduction had been unremittingly narrated as deviant, Briggs demonstrates how federal social welfare policies operated as powerful media for social control, while concomitantly creating a new framework within which activists could structure and sustain strategies of resistance.

Throughout her book, Briggs brings into relief how these thorny issues were presented through rhetorics of gender and race, by a host of social actors including feminists, the U.S. military, philanthropists, nationalists, missionaries,

0010-4175/04/854–858 $9.50 © 2004 Society for Comparative Study of Society and History

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417504210398 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the federal government, and natural and social scientists. While their specific interests in these "social problems" differed, their involvement enabled and legitimized each entity's institutional claim to power and allowed them to play off each other as foils, whether in concert or opposition. Ultimately, they worked out their larger policy prescriptions on the bodies of Puerto Rican women.

While Briggs provides valuable insight into the material circumstances of working class Puerto Rican women and the ways in which their lives became fodder for the agendas of so many, she consciously leaves their voices out of her study. Working within subaltern studies, Briggs questions the utility of requiring the oppressed to "speak for themselves" and justifies her decision by arguing that such efforts often act as a methodological subterfuge for the researcher's own analytical and ideological proclivities, while simultaneously functioning as a form of intellectual dishonesty that occludes the politics inherent in the production of knowledge. However, in light of the fact that she allows so many of her subjects to speak for themselves, the silence left by the absence of these women's stories is deafening. Although Briggs anticipates this criticism and addresses it at length in the book's epilogue, her effort to avoid provoking "pity, outrage or contempt in order to further one or another agenda in relation to the island," has all but reduced these women to the characters painted by those she has allowed to speak in the book.

Reproducing Empire is a significant work that makes an important contribution to American and Latin American Studies, politics, history, and gender studies. It not only challenges readers' assumptions about the relationship between culture, race, gender, and the state, but also presents a larger context for understanding contemporary processes of globalization, imperialism, and citizenship.

———Kimani Paul-Emile, American Studies, New York University

Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

That 'modernity' is not *simply* a Western export to the rest of the world has been much noted recently. Only rarely, though, has the relationship between local and global, colonizers and colonized, and the West and 'the rest' in the production of modernity been so rigorously explored as it is in Timothy Mitchell's new book, *Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity.* With precise, careful analysis of such phenomenon as the economy, capitalism, and expertise, Mitchell illuminates how the world in which we live came to acquire its particular shape.

Perhaps the best way to describe the contents of the book is by way of the subtitle, as each of these terms is a focus of Mitchell's investigation. As a book about Egypt, *Rule of Experts* offers tremendous insight into the forces that have

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417504210398 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shaped its modern conditions, both colonial and post-colonial. Mitchell traces transformations in Egypt's property regimes, in its agricultural production (and related food consumption), and in its market structures. Central to this narrative is an investigation of capitalism that, as Mitchell suggests, seeks to "take more seriously the variations, disruptions, and dislocations that make each appearance of capitalism . . . something different" (248). In tracing this appearance in Egypt, the book provides new understandings of the conditions of globalization.

Rule of Experts is an important contribution to the literature on modernity. Its most forceful aspect is the discussion of the place of 'the real' within this configuration. Mitchell develops arguments from his earlier book, *Colonising Egypt,* to argue that modernity is distinguished by new ways of dividing up the world into the real and the representation, and that this division enables new ways of governing and living. He takes issue with a purely constructivist view of this production and urges us to take both sides of the division seriously, to see them both as crucial to a new politics of "techno-science."

Mitchell's analysis of techno-politics, "which claimed to bring the expertise of modern engineering, technology, and social science to improve the defects of nature, to transform peasant agriculture, to repair the ills of society, and to fix the economy" (15), is a particularly impressive part of the book. He details how new forms of expertise, new modes of knowledge, and new styles of intervention into the natural and social worlds reconfigured Egypt. *Rule of Experts* is, then, an investigation of the social sciences, and an important one at that. At the heart of this line of analysis is Mitchell's claim (contra Foucault) that "the economy" is a product of the twentieth century. He argues persuasively that it was not until the 1950s that the economy as a discrete object, "the realm of a social science, statistical enumeration, and government policy" (81) was fully realized.

These themes are traced throughout the nine connected essays which make up the book (some of which have been previously published). In each essay sophisticated theoretical analysis is developed through consideration of detailed empirical material. Due in part to this careful intertwining, *Rule of Experts* is not only enlightening, but also a pleasure to read. This book will be an important one both to students of Middle Eastern history and society and to critically-minded historians and social scientists more generally.

———Ilana Feldman

Sami Zubaida, *Law and Power in the Islamic World.* New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004, 248 pp., $55, £35, ISBN 1-86064-865-7.

Sami Zubaida's *Law and Power in the Islamic World* is a fascinating politico-social history of the relations between Islamic law and the procession of polit-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417504210398 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ical masters who have ruled the Middle East since the Prophet's death. One message is clear: the notion of an omnipotent *shariʾa,* passed from caliph to caliph for fourteen centuries, is a myth held by both Islamist radicals and their Western critics.

Zubaida shows how the *shariʾa*—a body of texts and practices distinct from the Qu'ran itself, evolved for several centuries after Mohammed from both pre-Islamic tradition and the deliberations of four distinct theological schools. Though the *shariʾa* and the growing body of juristic precedent, or *fiqh,* which accreted to it, gained a certain path-dependency through 'traditionalization,' Islamic law always occupied a specialized niche in the Islamic polity. Clerics in the medieval and early modern caliphates, from the Umayyads to the Ottomans, were subordinate to the ruler and usually complicit in the hedonistic and corrupt lifestyle of the imperial elite. As part of this elite, the *ulama* provided religious legitimacy for the ruler's actions, and clerical posts—part of the power structure of state—were often passed down through families or purchased outright.

Not only did state prevail over religion, but the imperial state consistently intruded into the province of the law. Part of the reason is practical: The *shariʾa* provides guidance in only a limited number of the spheres (family law, and some commercial law) necessary in a complex polity. Accordingly, a good deal of law was promulgated by administrators, notably in the public arena. *Shariʾa* prescriptions regarding alcohol or the charging of interest were generally fudged with clerical acquiescence. Meanwhile, much litigation bypassed the traditional, clerical *Qadi* courts. State courts handled a great number of cases, with guilds, millets, and tribes adjudicating in disputes between their own members.

So where did the myth of a monolithic *shariʾa* and 'traditional' Islamic theocracy come from? To a limited extent, there existed a literalist theological tradition extending from ibn Hanbal through ibn Taimiya and the Kharijites, which railed against the corruption of rulers (often foreign ones like the Mamlukes or Mongols). But this current of thought—taken by Ernest Gellner as emblematic of the paradigm of '*umma* (faithful masses) versus corrupt ruler,' is shown by Zubaida to be exceptional in the history of the Muslim Middle East.

The second half of the book considers the progressive centralization of the state and consequent étatization of the law under the late Ottomans. In addition to growing state encroachment on the religious courts and institutions, there occurred, in the nineteenth century, the first egalitarian reforms designed to raise the citizenship status of non-Muslim minorities. Meanwhile, laws were increasingly codified along European lines, encroaching on traditional *shariʾa* territory like commercial law.

A populist, anti-Western backlash against the equal status of non-Muslims heralded the rise of the kind of Islamist *ressentiment* current today. One form of this Islamic 'nationalism' was the politicization of *shariʾa* as a symbol of Muslim resistance to Western power and cultural influence—a recurring mo-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417504210398 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tive that Zubaida holds to be the principal motor behind much contemporary Islamist agitation.

The twentieth century, which Zubaida analyses through comprehensive chapters on the Egyptian and Iranian cases, began as an age of liberal reform in the Middle East. Modernizers like Ataturk in Turkey, Reza Shah in Iran, and Nasser in Egypt firmly suppressed the *ulama* and ran secular regimes, despite paying lip service to the *shariʾa.* However, the recrudescence of Islamist sympathies at the popular level helped to fertilize the revival of Islamist politics which burst forth in the 1970s. In Egypt, Sadat brought in the Islamists as an instrumental ploy to outflank the Nasserist left, while in Iran an Islamist Revolution triumphed in 1979. Though the *shariʾa* is very much on the lips of the new Islamist movement, Zubaida contends that—even in Iran—strong pragmatic imperatives have stalled or curtailed the implementation of most *shariʾa* provisions. Zubaida concludes by arguing that much of the *shariʾa* is simply not well-suited to the exigencies of a modern complex state, and that the young, women, and intellectuals are growing increasingly disenchanted with Islamist politics in Iran, and even to some extent in Egypt.

This is a complex *tour d'horizon* which is rich in legal, political, and historical detail. The book cleaves closely to its theme of the 'constructedness' and contingency of the *shariʾa,* and does carries this theoretical unity off well. The attempt to draw continuity between the modern and pre-modern epochs is executed magisterially. However, one might well demand to know why, if the historic trend is toward secular politics, Islamism has experienced such a pronounced resurgence. The challenge of the West, and the backlash of Islamic resentment, is centuries old, yet Islamist politics possesses an almost unprecedented amplitude. We get a sense of a seemingly puzzling welling up of social forces from below that does not square with the author's optimism about the discontent of women, youth, and the intellectuals. This discontinuity (possibly linked to forces like rural-urban migration, technological change and integration, theological innovation, or population growth) needs more explanation, even though it is not the main subject of the book. In a related manner, the idea that there is a functional imperative toward secularization has some merit, but shades into teleological optimism at certain points. The book's sections on premodern Islam are rich in detail and analysis, although there lurks in the mind of the Western reader the question of why the Arab bourgeoisie was so much less of a progressive force than its pre-modern Western (though not, alas, Eastern European) counterpart, and why Greco-Roman philosophy was so effectively blocked from the pantheon of Islamic legal thought in the pre-modern epoch. Minor omissions aside, this is a stimulating, timely, and fascinating read that has much to contribute to academics, students, and practitioners of politics.

———Eric Kaufmann, University of London

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417504210398 Published online by Cambridge University Press