

of a mature and “modern” youthful generation that has rejected those older values in favor of a presumably more progressive moral individualism. Putting aside the problematic categories of tradition and modernity that the author puts to use in the chapter, it is not entirely clear that a more “mature” social outlook has prevailed in this “sequel.” After all, the modernist hero of *E'teraz* initially forsakes his love for family considerations, just as one might expect the popular film heroes of the Pahlavi era to do. Likewise, the hero is only reunited with his love once his “traditionally minded” brother makes the ultimate sacrifice during another instance of street justice—again, just as one might expect in the prerevolutionary popular cinema. If the chapter’s purpose is to demonstrate the eclipse of the revolutionary moment, of earlier popular film tropes, and the reformist movement’s contribution to a transformation of society in line with what scholars have claimed to characterize the citizenry in Western liberal democracies, then this particular film case study would seem to fall short of that goal.

Atwood moves beyond the Khatami presidency in the final chapter to examine the persistence of reformist themes in film and video in the years since. He reasserts that, while many scholars have viewed the Islamic Revolution as a major catalyst for change in Iranian cinema, the reformist era has had a far longer and more profound effect on its aesthetics and politics. His conclusion in turn discusses the Cinema Museum in Tehran, which Atwood asserts has been a key institutional support for a reform cinema that advocates the individual autonomy of filmmakers and their work in the face of intense state pressure for ideological conformity. Its “defiant” placement of a poster for Ja’far Panahi’s *In film nist* (*This Is Not a Film*, 2011), despite the director’s official ban from filmmaking, is presented as evidence of the institution’s reformist credentials. Again, a clearer sense of the battle lines and the forces arrayed in opposition to reform cinema would have benefited the chapter. Indeed, at various points here and elsewhere, the author seemingly suggests that reform cinema has engaged more in a politics of radical dissent than in one of consent and reform within the institutional limits of the Islamic Republic. His discussion of Panahi’s recent oeuvre in particular stresses this revolutionary potential at the heart of what he calls reform cinema.

The book quite rightly points to a problem in the existing literature that far too neatly divides the history of Iranian cinema into a pre- and postrevolutionary phase, each supposedly characterized by a unique set of filmmaking conditions and concerns. Atwood seeks to question the uniform character of postrevolutionary film but what he has labeled a reform cinema or aesthetic is not always different from what others have labeled postrevolutionary. Ironically he is most successful in disrupting these divisions when he identifies thematic and structural links between the pre and postrevolutionary cinemas, despite some gaps in the analysis. He is certainly asking the right questions even if the answers are not always satisfying. Further aggravating these lapses in the arguments raised are a number of typographical errors, malapropisms, grammatical slip-ups, and mistakes in citations that should be addressed in any future revision. Despite these criticisms, this book is an important contribution and part of a welcome but tentative (sometimes painfully so) broadening to Iranian film studies.

FARZIN VAHDAT, *Islamic Ethos and the Specter of Modernity*, Anthem Middle East Studies (London: Anthem Press, 2016). Pp. 300. \$82.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781783084364

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As its title suggests, *Islamic Ethos and the Specter of Modernity* seeks to show that 20th-century Muslim thinkers have appropriated modernity’s “ethos,” defined as the expansion of human agency and subjectivity. Using a Hegelian analytical model, Farzin Vahdat argues that human “mediated

subjectivity” grows as it gradually derives more autonomy from God’s absolute omniscience and agency (pp. xiv–xv, 1). The book’s real strength, however, is the author’s systematic presentation of thinkers whose work is available only in Persian. This alone makes *Islamic Ethos and the Specter of Modernity* a valuable contribution to Islamic studies and comparative global intellectual history. The book is clearly written and well organized with each of its nine chapters devoted to a major figure. This review follows the book’s structure, noting highlights of each chapter, and gauges the persuasiveness of its thesis on the Muslim intellectual appropriation of modernity’s “ethos.”

Chapter 1 begins astutely with Mohammad Iqbal (1877–1938), whose pioneering modernist interpretation of Islam is an intellectual benchmark for almost all 20th-century Muslim thinkers. Iqbal focused on “selfhood” (*khudi*), reinterpreting a familiar notion in classical Persian Sufi poetry to mean something approaching modern individual self-awareness. The cultivation of individual selfhood, however, is possible only through its derivation from the Divine Self (pp. 17–21). According to Iqbal, the modern “West” has acquired a “predatory” nature due to assuming irreconcilable subject–object separations, a dichotomy that a properly modern Islamic worldview can overcome (pp. 34–35). Politically, Iqbal was an anticolonial but prenationalist thinker who initially saw Turkish Republicanism and even Bolshevism as compatible with Islam, while rejecting their secularism and/or atheism. Eventually, he accepted the emergence of Muslim nation-states, arguing for a Muslim “League of Nations” and a proper mix of politics and religion within individual Muslim countries without explaining exactly how this could be accomplished (pp. 46–51).

The first major blueprint for a modern Islamic state was drawn up by Abul ‘Ala Maududi (1903–79). Breaking with Indian nationalism, Maududi founded Jama’at-i Islami (Islamic Association), a political movement working toward the establishment of Pakistan. His political philosophy started with the Qur’an’s designation of humanity as God’s “vice-regent” on earth, but invested this capacity in a Muslim intellectual elite leading the community by force and violence when necessary. He advocated for a modern “Islamic Republic,” claiming Islam had originated as a “social revolution” against political corruption and class oppression. Maududi admitted his illiberal Islamic Republic resembled both communist and fascist states, but insisted it was not totalitarian or dictatorial (pp. 66, 69). His republic was also sternly patriarchal, denying women’s right to political office and keeping them under male guardianship (pp. 78, 87–88). According to Vahdat, despite its illiberal character, Maududi’s “proto-republicanism” validates the book’s thesis on the progress of human agency, since it has “the *potential* of preparing a population for self-rule and republicanism” (p. 90).

The book’s third Muslim thinker, Egypt’s Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), stands much closer intellectually to Maududi than to Iqbal. Like Maududi, he upheld patriarchy, believing women’s “nature” necessitated their staying at home to serve the family. From such “natural” harmony in the family, Qutb extrapolated his utopian model of a harmonious Muslim society. He believed “Western” societies were based on conflict among individuals and classes, requiring the modern state’s repressive intervention. In contrast, his ideal Islamic government invests all power in an indivisible moral leadership, which can be one person or an assembly (pp. 106–9). Vahdat concedes human subjectivity in Qutb’s “discourse is contingent, inchoate, and hostile to the individual as its carrier.” Nevertheless, he sees Qutb’s “legacy” as yet another form of proto-republicanism, which could lead to the emergence of “a more developed individual self” and citizenship rights (pp. 113–14).

The book’s argument about the unfolding emancipatory potential of Islamic modernism finds better support in the chapter on Moroccan feminist scholar Fatima Mernissi (1940–2015). During her Freudian Marxist intellectual phase, Mernissi proposed a radical feminist critique of the entire Islamic tradition. She later cast this critique in a Muslim perspective, claiming, as Christian feminists had done for Jesus, that the Prophet Muhammad’s initially gender egalitarian teaching had been corrupted by the patriarchal impositions of his immediate successors. Vahdat observes how Mernissi’s commitment to gender egalitarian “sovereign individuality” is rooted in her resolute attention to “the body and sexuality” (p. 137). More to the point, Mernissi wants to

liberate women's bodies and sexuality, in glaring contrast to Maududi and Qutb, who are obsessed with controlling them. These thinkers hardly can be considered involved in the same project of expanding human agency.

The book's central argument becomes more convincing in its second half, which also is more coherent because it focuses on four Iranian thinkers, three of whom lend support to Vahdat's thesis on the expansion of Muslim "mediated subjectivity," while the fourth is its antithesis. The first, Mehdi Haeri Yazdi (1923–99), is an ayatollah with a doctorate in theology from Tehran University and another in analytical philosophy from the University of Toronto. Predictably, Haeri tried to reconcile classical Islamic theology and modern philosophy. To do so, he resorted to familiar notions of God as the Supreme Necessary Being, sustaining a chain or "pyramid of existence" and encompassing humans and all other beings. Haeri's political philosophy was liberal, committed to individual subjectivity, and anchored in "natural rights" and "private proprietorship." This, of course, led to his political marginalization in postrevolutionary Iran's clerically dominated Islamic Republic (pp. 145–46, 157–59).

Next comes Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari (b. 1936), whose traditional seminary training was followed by ten years of residence and study in Germany. Thus, Shabestari was able to systematically apply the German hermeneutic tradition to Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*). According to him: "Verses [of the Qur'an] do not speak themselves. It is the interpreter (*mofasser*) who raises a question . . . His question contains basic assumptions that are not derived from the Qur'an itself." As might be expected, Shabestari's political philosophy is quite liberal, considering God as the inspiration of broad ethical principles and not of particular rules or forms of government (pp. 176–77). Vahdat acknowledges intellectual affinity with Shabestari, but is insufficiently attentive to the radicalism of his epistemological and political break with authoritarian modernists, such as Qutb and Maududi, as well as liberals such as Iqbal and Haeri.

Similarly assimilated to the book's overall argument is the modernism of Mohammad Khatami (b. 1943), Iran's "philosopher president," whose discourse called for opening up the country's intellectual and political space. Khatami's critique of Islamic "despotism" and "tyranny," however, lacked Shabestari's epistemological rigor, while he and his fellow "reformist" Muslim intellectuals could not explain how their reconciliation of Islam and liberal democracy was to be achieved under rigid clerical rule.

Still, Khatami's Islamic liberalism stands in sharp contrast to the decidedly antimodernist discourse of Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933). Vahdat reserves his harshest criticism for Nasr, calling his intellectual project an "attempt to destroy or at least minimize the notion of human agency and subjectivity" (p. 231). Nasr identified with Traditionalism, a 20th-century theosophical movement, whose European founders were attracted to "traditional" and "Eastern" cultures, particularly Islam, which supposedly had preserved what the modern West had lost due to its embrace of secular humanism. The official leader of the worldwide Traditionalist movement, and earlier politically aligned with the Iranian monarchy, Nasr is the one intellectual categorically excluded from Vahdat's roster of "mediated subjectivity" proponents.

The book's final chapter is on Mohammad Arkoun (1928–2010), the Algerian-born scholarly advocate of opening up Islamic tradition to democratic reinterpretation. Basically, Arkoun saw the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (hadith) as discursive formations whose meaning is contingent on the historical context of interpretation. Orthodox Muslims confine the range of interpretations to the limits of their own knowledge and interests. In contrast, Arkoun is interested in the Islamic "unthinkable" and "unthought," arguing also that "factual" and given definitions of religion make it a handmaiden to political power (pp. 255–56, 238). Appreciative of Arkoun's epistemology, Vahdat nevertheless is critical of his "idealism" and "emphasis on intellectualism and culturalism" (pp. 263–64). This is a curious critique, since Vahdat's book is focused on individual thinkers and their ideas, largely abstracted from diverse historical and national backgrounds spanning from India to Algeria. To his credit, Vahdat distinguishes his own abstractions from the flattened

universalism of “prodemocracy” scholars, such as Vali Nasr, who advocate “for the promotion of capitalism for the multitude to bring about modernity and democracy in the Muslim world” (p. 269). Still, he seems in agreement with Arkoun’s dismissal of Islamic socialism, evinced by the absence in his book of left-leaning Muslim modernists such as Iran’s Ali Shariati. In the end, and even if one disagrees with its overarching thesis, *Islamic Ethos and the Specter of Modernity* remains a remarkable and highly recommended book that systematically introduces us to a plethora of ideas articulated by some of the 20th century’s most influential thinkers reflecting on Islam and modernity.

AZRIEL BERMANT, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Pp. 273. \$99.99 cloth. ISBN: 9781107151949

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In this meticulously detailed account, Azriel Bermant comprehensively demolishes the myth that Margaret Thatcher was always more sympathetic towards Israel than senior figures in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), many of whom were Arabists. Certainly, Bermant demonstrates Thatcher admired the Israelis for their achievements and was attentive to the views of leading members of the Jewish community in Britain and Jewish voters in her Finchley constituency. Yet, as he also documents, Thatcher’s assessments of how best to advance British interests in the Middle East converged far more with those of the FCO than senior Israeli officials chose to believe. Crucially, as she gained more knowledge and self-confidence, it was she, not the FCO officials, who determined the direction of British Middle East policy. Indeed, even though she was close to U.S. President Ronald Reagan, she differed with him on policy priorities in the Middle East. She accepted and defended the European Community’s Venice Declaration of 1980 and with it the right of Palestinians to self-determination, notwithstanding Israeli objections on both counts. She also enthusiastically promoted arms exports to the Arab Gulf states, while maintaining an embargo on British oil and weapons sales to Israel.

Understanding the nuances of Thatcher’s policies requires a historical understanding of British foreign policy during her era. For most of her tenure in No. 10 Downing Street, Thatcher’s primary concern was to counter the expansion of Soviet influence in the region and she saw the persistence of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a vehicle for radicalization which Moscow could exploit. She was frustrated, however, by what she perceived as a lack of commitment or sense of urgency in Washington to match her own and that of what she termed the “moderate Arab leaders.” Unlike the Americans, Thatcher derived many of her insights from frequent conversations with King Husayn of Jordan, with whom she formed a close and sympathetic rapport, until that was shattered by their differences over the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Thatcher’s aspiration for most of the 1980s was that the Israelis could be persuaded to enable resolution of the Palestinian issue through the creation of a federation between the West Bank (occupied by Israel in the 1967 war) and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (which had ruled the West Bank between 1948 and 1967). Thatcher did not want a fully independent Palestinian state, however, not least because of her distrust of Yasir Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Her views on the PLO, as Bermant explains, were determined by her antipathy to dealing with any terrorist organization, including the Irish Republican Army—though she rebuffed Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir for implying an exact equivalence since “the latter’s supporters could express their wishes through free elections” (p. 196), unlike Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. Accordingly, Thatcher advocated mayoral elections in the West Bank