

This book should definitely be translated into English for a wider readership. Books in general do not solve fundamental sociocultural problems, but by reconsidering the heritage of the past they can help us to think again. ✂

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JULIE BILLAUD. *Kabul Carnival: Gender Politics in Postwar Afghanistan*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. viii + 209 pages, chronology, notes, bibliography, index, acknowledgements. Cloth US\$55.00 ISBN 978-0812246964

In response to feminist justifications for the war in Afghanistan, Arundhati Roy once posed the rhetorical question: “Can we bomb our way to a feminist paradise?” The same dissonance expressed in Roy’s quip inspired anthropologist Julie Billaud to examine the long-term demands placed on contemporary urban Afghan women as a result of war and foreign interventionism, exploring how their lives have changed in the intervening years since the US invasion and whether or not we can say they’ve changed for the better. The resulting monograph, *Kabul Carnival: Gender Politics in Postwar Afghanistan*, reveals the complex negotiations Afghan women undertake on a daily basis, where every decision—whether in terms of clothing, education, or career—becomes a political statement. While in the West the public sphere is connected with assumptions of increased freedom, in Afghanistan gender politics and cultural expectations place boundaries on women’s public participation wherein they must actively perform their identities and adapt them to situations and contexts that are constantly in motion. Combating stereotypes and typical Orientalist portrayals of Afghan women as passive burka-clad victims, Billaud’s study bears witness to their extreme resourcefulness and tenacity, depicting these women as individual agents actively negotiating the varied landscapes of war, occupation, and reconstruction.

Billaud’s study is divided into six topical chapters. The first provides an historical overview, beginning with the reign of King Amanullah (1919–1929) and carrying through to the U.S. invasion of 2001. In this chapter, Billaud frames modern Afghan history around the tensions between both modernity versus tradition and imagined ideals versus reality, that have shaped Afghan’s women’s lives throughout the twentieth century. Billaud also shows how Western colonial narratives of Muslim women have influenced

policies and gender ideals through binary depictions of women as either uncovered and liberated or veiled and subordinate. By doing so, she shows how women's bodies have been used by each regime to convey the power and vision of the state—whether through Soviet-sponsored androgyny or Taliban-enforced purdah.

The following chapters explore contemporary urban women's experiences by delving into a variety of specific topics, including state-sponsored programs such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs; the legal system and neo-colonialism; beauty ideals and the media; the politics of veiling; and lastly public performance, especially through the medium of poetry. The limitations of reconstruction efforts, which view Afghan culture as monolithic and static, are exposed wonderfully through a series of vignettes that lay bare the discrepancies between Western ambitions and Afghan realities. While many failures have been written off as arising from the intractable nature of Afghan society, in reality "ready made" solutions have often been imposed—sometimes straight from the motivational literature of corporate America—without any regard for the context or social reality of Afghanistan. Not only has this limited progress, it has also fueled a counter-modern and inherently anti-Western backlash.

Billaud shows that it is in this setting that Afghan women form, negotiate, and assert their identities in myriad ways. To use the example of veiling from chapter 5, each woman must balance cultural, familial, political, and professional expectations in addition to her own personal beliefs and desires. It is not only the presence or absence of a veil, but also the kind of veil that becomes part of this political statement. These considerations all tie into one of Billaud's larger questions: how can a woman be free if every step she takes in the public sphere is imbued with highly-charged political meaning? What this study shows is that rather than becoming immobilized or discouraged by these multivalent considerations, Afghan women have continuously sought to improve their lives by actively engaging, challenging, and performing gender roles in diverse ways reflecting individual circumstances.

The major strengths of Billaud's study stem from her unabashed critique of the imperialist discourses that have shaped reconstruction efforts and from her insistence on portraying Afghan women as actively and constantly striving to improve both their own lives and their society after over three decades of violence, instability, and uncertainty. The vignettes are enlightening and can be easily and effectively incorporated into the undergraduate classroom. That being said, some exploration of the gender expectations placed on Afghan men would also be of interest, especially in challenging stereotypes and rounding out the discussion. Additionally,

Billaud moves fluidly between examples from different ethnic groups (Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek), without providing meaningful information on demographics or expressing much appreciation of cultural differences. To a specialist, this is a bit surprising and for non-specialists it could result in confusion and misinterpretations. Lastly, the historical overview could be much stronger, as Billaud's effort to simplify the story ends up distorting important parts of the narrative. Despite these drawbacks, Billaud's work represents a significant and illuminating contribution to both gender studies and the historiography of postwar Afghanistan. ✂

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PATRICIA BLESSING. *Rebuilding Anatolia after the Mongol Conquest: Islamic Architecture in the Lands of Rūm, 1240–1330.* Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014. xxiv + 240 pages, acknowledgements, list of abbreviations, note on transliteration, maps, footnotes, illustrations, plates, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$117.00 ISBN 978-1-4724-2406-8.

In this book, Patricia Blessing takes up historical themes as diverse as politics, trade networks, religious scholarship, patterns of patronage, the organization of craft workshops, and the emergence of a uniquely Anatolian expression of Islam. Across four case studies in as many chapters, she combines historical background with the formal description and analysis of specific buildings. The result is a richly textured exploration of a historical moment through its materialized form, offering important insights to scholars of history and architecture alike.

In Blessing's first two chapters, she traces the private patronage of Saljūq and Ilkhānid administrators in Konya and Sivas after 1243 to show how this patronage tracked broader political changes. In Konya, private commissions brought monumental architecture out from the urban core, which had received the bulk of earlier royal Saljūq attention. In the absence of the Saljūq court, and at a distance from the Ilkhānid, these buildings also helped establish Sufi communities as foci of Anatolian Islamic society.

The rise of the Ilkhānate, meanwhile, had a significant impact in Sivas, the new regional capital under the Mongols, where three major madrasas were built in one year (AH 670/1271-2 CE). Taken together, these madrasas show