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Middle Eastern Lives in America

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projects and global economic trends battered some classes and created new ones. However, the ideology of each class may vary from one period to the next or from one class faction to the next. For example, Moaddel notes that Islamic modernism was stronger in Egypt than in Iran in the 19th century, despite similarities in the two countries' social structures. He attributes the difference in part to the smaller cadre of modern-educated Iranians, but primarily to the lack of "discursive pluralism" in Iran. If Christian missionaries had been permitted greater voice in Iran, Moaddel argues, Islamic modernism might have developed to a greater extent (p. 109). For Islamic fundamentalism, Moaddel goes even farther in undermining the relationship between social structure and ideology. In Iran, Moaddel locates fundamentalism in older social classes, the bazaar and the Islamic religious establishment; in Jordan, building on his earlier work on Jordanian exceptionalism, Moaddel associates fundamentalism with the new middle class; in Algeria, he associates it with peasants and the urban poor.

All comparative-historical studies of this grand scale, including Moaddel's and Wuthnow's, are vulnerable to questions about representativeness: to what extent are the conclusions a product of the selection of cases? For Moaddel's book, how well does the argument apply to other Islamic societies? Ottoman Turkey, for example, experienced Islamic modernism similar to Egypt and North India, but it seems difficult to apply Moaddel's logic and attribute the pluralism of the Islamic modernist ideology to the pluralism of the Ottoman religious establishment. Or perhaps, unlike Moaddel's argument for other Islamic modernists, the Ottoman movement targeted the Ottoman state more than the institutions of civil society, in which case the Ottoman state reforms of the mid-19th century might indeed have provided an inspiration for the opposition's pluralism. The challenge in such an approach is to characterize the essence of an episode of discourse while doing justice to the variety of ideological currents within it, as well as variation over the course of the episode. Moaddel's book is a bold attempt to do both.

**Reviewer:** Charles Kurzman, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

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### **Middle Eastern Lives in America**

By Amir Marvasti and Karyn D. McKinney

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004. 171 pages. \$60 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper)

This is a perplexing book, as large claims are made for it in the foreword and by the authors, who claim it breaks new ground in laying out Middle Eastern contributions to the development of Western civilization and in portraying the experiences of Middle Eastern Americans. There is no bibliography, but the footnotes show that the authors have failed to consult the substantial literature that exists in both these areas. (Publications on Middle Eastern Americans that have been out for decades are reviewed in my own 2003 publication, *Muslims in the United States: the State of Research*).

Instead, this book's genesis relies on personal connections (xv-xvi) and the sense of urgency produced by the events of Sept. 11, 2001. The authors' position (p. xxi) is that Middle Eastern Americans "are considered a despised and dangerous minority group," and the research goal was to "bring to light the history and current experiences of this group with discrimination." Marvasti and McKinney, sociologists, set out to conduct formal interviews with 20 respondents (14 men and six women). We are not given the interview schedule or any systematic analysis. Nine of the 20 respondents were from Iran, six were from Pakistan, and one from Turkey; only two each from Egypt and Lebanon were Arabs and would fit most definitions of "Middle Eastern." But these authors define Middle Eastern as "having ancestral

ties to the predominantly Islamic region of the world in southwest Asia and North Africa (p. xx). The interviews were termed “in-depth” and “lasted an hour.” The authors also drew on informal sources of empirical data, defined on p. xix and ranging from their own life experiences to visits and gatherings.

The value of the book lies in the anecdotal material presented by authors and informants, but the anecdotes are presented without substantive background material or systematic analysis. It is a popularly-oriented political appeal and may have a place in provoking dialogues or providing topics for speeches and workshops on race and ethnicity in American life. Given the other academic literature out there on the topics touched on in this book, the claims made for it are considerably overstated.

**Reviewer:** Karen Leonard, *University of California, Irvine*

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### **Ethnic Routes to Becoming American: Indian Immigrants and the Cultures of Citizenship**

By Sharmila Rudruppa

Rutgers University Press, 2004. 239 pages. \$62 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper)

In an age of multiculturalism, how do new immigrant groups construct an American identity and assert their cultural claims to U.S. citizenship? What impact do racial and class backgrounds have on these processes? In this provocative study, Sharmila Rudruppa’s research focuses on two non-profit organizations, Apna Ghar, a battered women’s shelter, and the Indo American Center, a cultural association, in Chicago. She utilizes participant observation research methods to gain access as a paid staff member at the former and as a volunteer at the latter.

Rudruppa deliberately spends the first part of the book describing her observations and interactions at the two centers, with separate chapters discussing the workers and users of the sites. The organizations provide an interesting contrast. One is a social service agency with staff, volunteers and clients of varying racial backgrounds; the other is a cultural center, which has primarily Asian Indian volunteers and participants. Her skill as an ethnographer is admirable and her research notes are meticulous, allowing the reader to become immersed in the two sites.

Ironically, Rudruppa finds that both these ethnic organizations, contrary to the assumption that they are creating a separatist rhetoric, are inadvertently promoting assimilationist paradigms. Neither of these organizations is fulfilling its declared role of politicizing the community, rather it imposes assimilationist agendas, even to the extent of “de-ethnicizing” or “re-ethnicizing” community members. She explains how these ethnic organizations, originally created with interventionist goals, utilize more integrationist strategies as they have become more institutionalized and professionalized in order to compete for funding sources. Rudruppa acknowledges the vital service provided by Apna Ghar, but critiques this social service agency’s approaches to assisting women who seek shelter, particularly their directive of disciplining the women to disconnect with their ethnic communities or networks, which she argues is counterproductive to rebuilding their lives. Rather than raising the political consciousness of their clients by providing them with alternative gender roles, they reinforce patriarchal ones.

The second part of the book focuses on the theoretical implications of her case studies of immigrant activism, interrogating notions of ethnic authenticity and citizenship. She argues that the specter of whiteness shapes how racialized immigrants are selectively incorporated