

# UC San Diego

## MELA Notes

### Title

Shaikh & Seedat: The Women's Khutbah Book, Contemporary Sermons on Spirituality and Justice From Around the World

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convinced that the unit of analysis has determined the book's methodology, for what determines a methodology is the nature of the questions that are asked, and not its subject matter. Just because the book is about the body, it is not automatically a corporeal history, and perhaps the author could unpack what is significant about the body that allows him to ask a new set of questions. Nonetheless, the book's wide-ranging methodology does not in any way undermine the book's brilliance. Rather, it inspires the reader to consider myriad forms of new inquiries about the physical body of a nation in the span of one century.

The book's bibliography testifies to the great extent of Fahmi's research and can be consulted as a rich reading list for graduate students and researchers who have just embarked on the history of medicine in modern Islamic/ Muslim societies. The index, including names and titles, some concepts, and place names, could be more elaborate and consistent.<sup>120</sup> While the introduction might be too dense and theoretical for undergraduate students' needs, assigning single chapters in undergraduate courses could be fruitful. Overall, the book is an excellent addition to libraries focusing on the modern Middle East, History of Islam, Social History, History of Science, History of Medicine, and Science, Technology and Society.

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*The Women's Khutbah Book, Contemporary Sermons on Spirituality and Justice from around the world.* By Sa'diyya Shaikh and Fatima Seedat. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2022. Pp. 249, with glossary/bibliography/general index/index of

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<sup>120</sup> The following examples made me think of the indexing logic as being eclectic: why are Paris, London, and Syria indexed, while Alexandria, Cairo, and Damascus are not; or if the words "lake" or "slaughterhouse" or "butchers" are indexed, why not index "canal" or "hospital" or "bakers"—these terms too are conceptually significant to the project. "Vaccination against smallpox" is indexed for page 103, but there is no trace of it on the page.

Qur'anic verses/Index of Hadiths. \$35 (paperback) ISBN: 978-0300244168; \$35 (e-book) ISBN: 9780300269031.

"*The Women's Khutbah Book: Contemporary Sermons on Spirituality and Justice from Around the World*" was authored by Sa'diyya Shaikh and Fatimah Seedat and published by Yale University Press in 2022. The book serves two main purposes. On one hand, it is a valuable archival collection of khutbahs delivered by Muslim women, providing a significant number of examples from minbars around the world. Such an archival collection appears to have been previously unavailable. On the other hand, the authors did not limit their work to simply providing the texts of khutbahs. On an analytical level, they sought to categorize, interpret, and provide analysis based on the personal, social, and spiritual experiences of the Khatibahs (those delivering the khutbahs). The authors aimed to illustrate how Muslim women, who have historically been marginalized within patriarchal systems, have reclaimed their power and offered a feminine interpretation (*Tafsir*) of Islam. It is a form of resistance to the exclusion that many Muslim women have been indoctrinated to accept in the name of a contested tradition.

The book conveys three main aims. Firstly, it presents the ideas of Muslim women *khatibahs* as a source of feminist Muslim theology. Each khutbah is rooted in the personal, social, and spiritual experiences of the speaker on one side, and it sheds light on the sociohistorical context of her khutbah on the other. In each khutbah, several references to Qur'anic verses can be followed, and how *khatibahs* use their lived experiences to give meaning to Qur'anic ethics is an important aspect of the book. The authors conceptualize this as "*Tafsir of praxis*." In other words, khutbahs provide an opportunity for reinterpreting and offering a feminine interpretation of the Quran.

The second goal that the book pursues is to give a voice to the voiceless within the Muslim community. Women, as a marginalized group in the patriarchal atmosphere of the Muslim community, have found the chance to foster new narratives of Islam in relation to their marginalized experiences and understanding. Finally, the book seeks to provide resources for communities to develop egalitarian khutbah practices. The authors see the book as a Muslim feminist project that articulates engagement with tradition, drawing on a genealogy of

Islamic teachings originating in the revolutionary prophetic impulse toward social and spiritual equality for all people.

The book is divided into four main chapters. In the first short chapter, "From the Musallah to the Minbar," it presents the historical limitations on women's engagement in collective Islamic practices and highlights the long journey that has led to Muslim women being able to deliver khutbahs from minbars today.

The second chapter, which serves as the centerpiece of the book, provides several khutbahs delivered by women from around the world. These include khutbahs from prominent figures such as Amina Wadud, an Islamic feminist. It is interesting to note how each *khatibah* begins to narrate her personal and social experiences in relation to Islamic ethics, how she applies Qur'anic verses, and how she concludes the speech by illustrating a new narrative of a specific Islamic notion in relation to femininity and modern life. This chapter is divided into five sections, each of which contains a selection of khutbahs. These sections are as follows:

1) Feminist Ontologies: Rahmah and Adl, which concentrate on framing the origins of human-divine relations and our ontological locations.

2) Subjectivity and Consciousness: Ihsan, which focus on subjectivity and virtuous self-formation in everyday relationships, critical for spiritual growth, and the practical realization of our ontological potential.

3) Sociality and Difference: Maslahah, which discusses cultivating spirituality through respectful forms of engagement with others.

4 & 5) Resisting Injustice: Ummah and Ubuntu, Marriage: Mawaddah and Mithaq, which seeks to analyze various forms of systematic violence and injustice and respond with communal solidarities among the greater community of believers.

Each of these sections illustrates a relationship between a contemporary issue and an Islamic concept.

The third chapter, "Conceptualizing a Tafsir of Experience," attempts to analyze the collected khutbahs as a new interpretation of Islam from a marginalized feminine perspective. Interestingly, the authors include a practical guide to writing a khutbah in the last part of the book, providing encouragement for the continued practice of women delivering khutbahs by other Muslim women. Prominent scholars in Islamic studies and Muslim Feminist studies, such as Omid

Safi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, and Mulki Al-Sharmani, have written blurbs for this book, recognizing it as an important work in the field.

"*The Women's Khutbah Book, Contemporary Sermons on Spirituality and Justice from around the world*," is a valuable contribution to Islamic feminism. It goes beyond merely providing a unique collection of khutbahs delivered by Muslim women from around the world; it also broadens its scope by categorizing and analyzing a diverse range of khutbahs delivered by women.

The book imbues each khutbah with a feminine perspective, highlighting the core message of each sermon and demonstrating their connections to Islamic principles and contemporary issues. For scholars focusing on Islamic feminism, this book serves as an excellent reference, offering an original collection of content delivered by Muslim women as *khatibahs*. It represents a commendable effort to provide an analysis from the perspective of Islamic feminism.

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*Egypt at the Crossroads: Domestic Stability and Regional Role.*

Phoebe Marr (ed.). Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1999. Pp. 253, No bibliography [each chapter has endnotes]. Online access through Catalog of U.S. Government Publications (CGP). 1-5706-022-6

*Egypt at the Crossroads: Domestic Stability and Regional Role* is the result of a multi-year collaboration between two strategic studies centers: The Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University (Washington D.C.) and The National Center for Middle East Studies (Cairo). Situated at the crossroads of many fields, the volume's contributors include policymakers, academics, economists, and military professionals from the United States and Egypt.

*Egypt at the Crossroads* consists of three sections, triangulating U.S.-Egyptian relations in the changing regional security environment