

A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America, by Leila Ahmed. Yale University Press, 2011. 352pp. Hb. \$30.00, ISBN-13: 9780300170955; Pb. \$22.00, ISBN-13: 9780300181432.

Reviewed by Catherine Goodall, *The University of Nottingham*, catherine.goodall1@gmail.com.

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Overall this is an interesting and well written exploration of the themes and trends underlying the changing attitudes towards veiling in the US and Egypt. Writing in an interpretive style, using her wealth of personal and academic experience on the topic, Ahmed has crafted a fascinating study.

This text examines the trends and circumstances surrounding veiling over the past hundred or so years across the two cultures that Ahmed suggests she is most attuned to. Yet the focus of the text frequently shifts from the changes surrounding veiling, to a general interest in Islamism, a particular form of Islam which she describes with great skill. Ahmed skilfully synthesizes arguments from academics, activists and other observers of Muslim cultures to provide an overview of the key issues. Providing anecdotal, historical and academic evidence, she traces veiling from its commonplace origins pre-1900s, to its loss of popularity in the 1920s and beyond, to an uneven resurgence in the 1970s and again post 9/11, situating these trends in the personal and political changes of the times. Considering the hugely increased interest in the intricacies of Islam, and its treatment of women in particular, this book is well timed and well considered.

She often makes general links between veiling and Islamism in particular, which give credence to this separate focus, but the text could perhaps have done with making this focus more explicit. A consideration of Islamism is illuminating and appears to be a crucial aspect affecting veiling developments, and as such the book could have benefitted from making these links clearer, both in the title and explanations. Also, the conclusions focus mostly on the general activism of Muslims in the US and beyond, with regard to women's rights and the spread of Islamism. A final chapter tying in the varied streams of thought, and situating the changes she depicts in relation to patterns of veiling and unveiling, would have been of benefit here.

Throughout this study, Ahmed suggests that her personal opinions and prejudices surrounding veiling and Islamism have changed. She begins the discussion by both highlighting her distrust of Islamism (tying it to the violence perpetrated by the violent wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt she grew up among), and by suggesting that the veil for her carried connotations of male dominance and gender bias. She explicates the numerous meanings that the veil has held for different groups of people, yet seems to retain the general inclination towards the veil as a symbol of some form of oppression or subjugation. The views she presents on Islamism, however, change drastically over the course of this text, acknowledging that the violence she experienced in her youth and attributed to Islamism, was in fact carried out by extremist factions who had broken from the mainstream Islamist groups, and who were acting in direct contrast to the values of Islamism. She concludes finally that Islamism is a positive force, bringing with it activism and a desire to improve the experience of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The investigation considers the myriad reasons for women taking up and rejecting the veil over the last century or so. Its central message is that women tend to choose whether or not to veil for predominantly personal and cultural reasons, but that these reasons are generically similar, and that these patterns of veiling have been and can be exploited for political gains. A dominant and significant theme of the book is that Islam itself is not pejorative to women, or intent on oppressing or subduing them. It concludes with a positive outlook on veiling and modern Islamism, suggesting that the veil can be a personal choice, *as well as* a politically charged symbol.