

A Most Masculine State

Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia

Saudi women are often described as either victims of patriarchal religion and society or successful survivors of discrimination imposed on them by others. Madawi Al-Rasheed goes beyond these images to explore the historical, political, and religious forces that made them enjoy far fewer rights than their counterparts in other parts of the Muslim world. Under the patronage of the state and its religious nationalism, women became hostage to political projects in which they must represent contradictory expectations. As symbols of both piety and modernity, women's emancipation is delayed and thwarted. Drawing on state documents, media sources, and women's voices, Al-Rasheed explores persistent gender inequality in what many Saudis and outsiders consider a unique situation. She examines the intersection between gender, religion, and politics that perpetuates women's exclusion. The author unveils projects initiated by the state, social controversies, religious rulings, and vibrant debates that dominate discussions of the 'woman question'. While women's struggle for greater recognition and equality has already started, the author sees light at the end of the tunnel.

Madawi Al-Rasheed is Professor of Anthropology of Religion at King's College, University of London. She specialises in Saudi history, politics, and society. Her publications include *Contesting the Saudi State* (2007), *Kingdom Without Borders* (2009), and *A History of Saudi Arabia* (2010).