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Review of van Es, Margaretha A. 2017. *Stereotypes and Self-Representations of Women with a Muslim Background: The Stigma of Being Oppressed*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, vii + 317pp, ISBN978-3-319-40675-6/

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In *Stereotypes and Self-Representations of Women with a Muslim Background*, social historian Margaretha van Es compares mainstream media discourses in Norway and the Netherlands about Muslim women with the representation of Muslim women produced by non-governmental organizations run by and serving ‘women with a Muslim background’ from 1975 to 2010. Van Es explains that the rather clunky phrase ‘women with a Muslim background’ is her own construct, designed to include not only women who identify as Muslim but also those ‘born in Muslim families or [who] trace their origins [to] predominantly Muslim countries, but who have never chosen to identify themselves as “Muslim women”’ (7). I didn’t see many individual women in the latter category in the book, but van Es does analyze interviews with women who ran organizations that served such women while identifying them by ethnicity rather than religion. The book offers a detailed and interesting analysis of these two sets of discourses in two different countries, and explores the tension between essentialism and self-representation.

The book is divided into an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction begins with the 2016 British controversy over Prime Minister James Cameron’s reference to the ‘traditional submissiveness of Muslim women’ and contrasts it with the hashtag *#traditionallysubmissive* created by Muslim women on twitter to represent themselves with complexity and diversity. This book engages readers beyond the Netherlands and Norway, demonstrating not only that stereotypes of Muslim women are widespread beyond these countries and continue beyond the period on which van Es focuses (1975–2000) but also that Muslim women are engaged in interesting ways of representing themselves across different kinds of media.

The introduction and conclusion are the book’s most thought-provoking parts, where van Es engages with literature on broader theoretical issues such

as (strategic) essentialism, belonging, representation, stereotyping, and citizenship. Chapter 2, 'Stereotypes of Women with a Muslim Background', provides an overview of public discourse about Muslim women in two major newspapers, one in the Netherlands and one in Norway. Van Es demonstrates that the number of articles of all types about Muslim women has increased over the period of her study, as has their negative focus on Islam; that most were written by non-Muslims; and that the main topics were women's emancipation and the need for immigrants to integrate into the dominant culture. In the middle chapters, van Es analyzes newspaper articles about Muslim women, interviews with NGO leaders, and published work by and about the organizations on which she focuses. The remainder of the core chapters focus on seven Dutch organisations and then on eight Norwegian organisations. Chapters 3 and 6 treat 'Self-Representations by Women in the ... Organisations', Chapters 4 and 7 treat 'The ... Organisations and Islam', and Chapters 5 and 8 treat, 'Women's Attempts to Break Stereotypes in ...' each country. Van Es argues that comparing historical development in the two countries strengthens her conclusion that 'women's growing urge to change the dominant image of their minority group has affected their organizational work' (293). She concludes the book with comments on 'a continuous tension between self-essentialism and emphasising internal diversity' (297), noting that women were caught between wanting to represent themselves as 'normal' Dutch or Norwegian women but having to emphasize their Muslimness in order to critique the dominant representation of them as Other, and thus unable to escape that Othering.

I could not help but wonder, however, if by focusing on organizations created by and for 'women with a Muslim background', van Es actually selected women caught in this paradoxical situation. What about 'women with a Muslim background' who don't get involved in such organizations? Might they represent themselves in ways that defy stereotypes without necessarily engaging directly with dominant discourses? I would have liked to hear more about how the tension between essentialism and self-representation complicates research on Muslim women. With the possible exception of a Dutch poster campaign depicting Muslim women in Chapter 5, the texts van Es explores are not of the same order as the tweets with which she opens the book. Rather, her stated focus 'is on women active in, and speaking on behalf of, a wide variety of minority self-organisations' (2); the difference between organizational representation *on behalf of women* and women's own self-representation is a subtle but important one that van Es largely elides. While her focus on Muslim women in an organizational context instead of on individual women is important, the way a Muslim women's organization represents Muslim women is only 'self-representation' if one has already essentialized 'Muslim women' as having a singular identity captured in the word *self*.

The book often left me lost in an alphabet soup of acronyms for various organizations and names of women who were not otherwise described with enough detail to humanize them. For readers beyond her immediate area of geographic interest, existing work on Islam and gender has largely focused on women in the Middle East, and van Es's most important contribution is her focus on contemporary Muslim women in the West, where conflicts between stereotypes and women's own concerns run high. Unlike the majority of work on gender

and Islam, which focuses on the discursive treatment of women within Islamic texts, van Es brings different methods and an important new focus on the discourse of Muslim women themselves as they negotiate their place in the world. The book made me hungry to hear more about, and from, individual Muslim women and their 'normal' day-to-day lives. There is still a need for research that helps the reader enter the worlds of Muslim women in the west by providing more detailed ethnographic context.