

as icons challenge public order, further transgress communal boundaries and even inspire conversions? In this final section, Heo investigates the collusion of the Orthodox Church and the state to insulate the Coptic community from its surrounding Muslim society by regulating and hiding miraculous icons and “their owners.” As images of holy persons and mediums of ritual, icons mediate saintly power for the embedded saint and believers who identify with them.

In a powerful ethnographic vignette, and one in which she is most frank about the challenges and omissions of fieldwork, Heo follows the story of Samya and her miraculous encounter of Virgin Mary in the delta city of Port Said. When Samya’s hands began to exude oil, the church quickly swept her to state security headquarters and then quarantined her behind monastery walls for five years as a consecrated deaconess. In confinement, Samya’s hands stopped producing oil, conceding its miraculous power to a Marian icon in her cell, allowing her transfer to a convent closer to her family before her death in 2012. The tactics of hiding women behind the monastery in the name of Christian-Muslim unity is relatively routine, highlights Heo, as the church regularly subjugates the rights of Coptic women for larger communal orders. To this day, Samya’s Marian icon continues to exude oil and is tightly regulated to Coptic communal spaces – adding yet another stop to Egypt’s topography as Holy Land.

Through interviews, Heo explores the various narratives that released Samya as the “owner” of her own miracles, narratives that displaced her oil-exuding hand with an oil-exuding icon of the Virgin Mary. Heo nods to the various class forces at play around Samya but also pays attention to the historical suspicion and clerical control that have long surrounded female visionaries in the region; as a bishop recounted to Heo, Samya’s miraculous hand and body posed a moral and spiritual threat to communal order (190). Heo follows the miracles’ narrative making further as the church hierarchy worked to contain any speculations that both the Virgin Mary and Sayyida ‘Aisha – Prophet Muhammad’s wife – participated in the miracles. Samya even briefly reappeared to the public to affirm the exclusive and sole Christian ownership of the miraculous icon and to contain potential public disorder and confusion. While it is the Marian icon that remains in the public sphere, Samya was quickly forgotten after her death and, despite her story, has not been cast as a public saint.

In the final chapter, Heo brings her arguments full circle and explores the category of “the contemporary saint,” the living presence of holiness in the modern era. How are contemporary saints publicly made and “published” into circulation? Importantly, how does the process create social spheres of inclusion and exclusion that revolve around maintaining a “mystical publicity” (212), an interplay between in/visibility, in/sanity and feigned holy foolery? Again, Heo curiously draws from antiquity; like the death masks that ensured the owners safe passage and place in the eternal realm, icons and publications are touchstones to eternally fixating these figures into saints. Saint making also hinges on the prolific publication – another visual tactility – to publicise the saints’ previously secret miraculous acts. In the nebulous period between a saint’s death and their official canonisation 50 years later, Heo follows the performance practice of secrecy, hidden visibility and shared silences around stories of the miraculous. Following the ethics of a mystical publicity, contemporary saintly canonisation requires a holy “perishing before publishing” (219).

In the anthropology of Christianity, Middle East studies, media studies and even the smaller circles of Coptic studies, *The Political Lives of Saints* offers an important intervention: it outlines the holy promises and perils of Coptic Orthodox saintly materialities in contemporary Egypt. Importantly, it traces the contemporary role of saintly mediations of Christian-Muslims relations leading up to and following the Egyptian uprisings. Its sensitive and thick ethnography makes it an obligatory read for students and scholars learning about the power of quotidian acts of faith and piety in the Middle East as it presses and passes through a pious sensorium. For Egypt’s Coptic Christians, touching saintly relics, seeing holy icons, and witnessing miraculous encounters form tactical ontologies – to not only navigate not only the terrible atrocities that make it to the headlines but also the quieter ebb and flow of day-to-day living as Christian minorities in a Muslim majority nation.

Regulated to communal conclaves by both the church and state, the saints and their holy deaths are also critical to Coptic community formation and agency, as Heo follows what happens to the living in the wake of sectarian violence and death. Given the ocular centrality of tactility still structuring wider anthropological and media discourse, Heo’s work will pair nicely with sound studies and scholarship of religious auditory tactilities: How does holiness also pass through the sensorium of the ear, complementing the rich material tactility of relics, apparitions and icons, as well as the sonic soundscapes of saints’ shrines and holy sites? Importantly, Heo paves the path for further inquiry into the gendered processes of saint making and unmaking in Egypt, and in the region more broadly. Students and academics alike will find rich conversations here and a model ethnography that is candid in the challenges and omissions of capturing the ephemeral materialities of faith. And in the thoughtful inquiries that Heo prompts about faith, belonging and quotidian encounters of the saints, readers will bring their own discerning questions.

References

Iskandar, Adel. 2013. *Egypt in Flux: Essays on an Unfinished Revolution*. Cairo: American University in Egypt.

Selby, Jennifer, Amelie Barras and Lori G. Beaman. *Beyond Accommodation: Everyday Narratives of Muslim Canadians*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018, 284 pages.

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Beyond Accommodation: Everyday Narratives of Muslim Canadians shares insights from a multidisciplinary study of the quotidian experiences of Muslims in Montreal, Quebec, and St John’s, Newfoundland. Rather than focusing primarily on Muslimness as a question of identity, the researchers explore the ways in which their interlocutors experience the mundane and unexceptional moments of daily life. By paying attention to “non-events” (5) such as attending a work party, buying

someone breakfast or exercising, the authors seek to offer an alternative perspective to the reasonable accommodation model, which they argue essentialises discourses on Muslims and Islam by centring on formal political requests for recognition. The authors propose a “navigation and negotiation” model that aims to capture the changing and dynamic aspects of lived religion in which social interactions with cultural and religious others are not always and only oriented toward the outcome of recognition. Although the power relations between majority and minority religious status remain salient, the participants’ narratives shed light on the dialogical and morally ambivalent lived experience of intercultural situations.

The book’s first chapter compiles a list of “figures” that reflect how Muslim Canadians are categorised according to stereotypes about and expectations for their identities and behaviors. Within the larger Good Muslim/Bad Muslim binary – a dichotomy closely tied to both state security and normative public discourses about secularism in Canada – five principle figures emerge: the Terrorist, the Imperiled Muslim Woman, the Enlightened Muslim Man, the Foreigner (and the Good Citizen) and the Pious Muslim. In addition to representing the ways in which Muslimness is perceived by Canadian society at large, the authors call attention to how these figures are reproduced in social research through the tendency to focus on piety and religious identity rather than on daily life and (banal) social interactions.

This critique of research sensibilities and methods carries over into the second chapter, which traces the history of Muslim settlement across Canada. Drawing on archival data and family histories, this chapter reveals how Muslims have been present throughout signpost moments in the mainstream Canadian story dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. The authors point to the dearth of scholarly accounts of Muslim Canadians prior to the contemporary periods of immigration and the post-9/11 era, periods marked disproportionately by studies about identity, discrimination and conflict. By taking into account people’s everyday lives, the authors suggest that the study of Islam and Muslims in Canada might move beyond the tendency to “produce a functional image of Canadian Muslims as defined by their religion, which is negatively construed” (83).

Chapter 3 foregrounds the discursive paradoxes of secularism that undergird the notion of reasonable accommodation. The authors show how culturally Christian aspects of the secular become structuring elements of their participants’ everyday lives in regard to time (for example, holiday periods), space (for example, prayer) and norms of social interaction (for example, greeting etiquette). The ubiquitous Christmas work party serves as a primary example for demonstrating the “embeddedness of Christianity” (92) in Canadian public life. The authors argue that although the secular is understood in Canadian public discourse as “neutral, inclusive and universal,” the research participants’ narratives reveal the ways in which “the rituals, sights and sounds” of Christianity are “rendered invisible” as simply part of a shared heritage, despite religious minorities’ observation of public life as rooted in aspects of the majoritarian religion (92).

However, the research participants’ accounts of finding quiet spaces for prayer, greeting opposite gender colleagues or navigating the presence of alcohol at holiday parties are not only narratives of conflict and negative experience. In fact, despite such moments of relational awkwardness and improvised theological deliberation, some narratives tell “a

story where celebrating Christmas and being Muslim are not self-exclusionary, where prayer can be about being comfortable with a space and not solely about requesting a space, and where gender equality and Muslim identity are not incompatible” (120). These narratives are effective at conveying the idea that although the ostensibly “neutral” claims of Canadian and Quebecois secularisms are untenable, the prevalence of culturally Christian practices is not necessarily experienced as problematic in and of itself. This being said, the authors make a point of reminding us that power relations can never be left out of the picture.

It is in the remaining chapters of the book that the authors lay out their main theoretical contribution: a navigation and negotiation model that aims to help researchers think beyond the accommodation perspective and the latter’s attendant identity-based analytical frameworks. Here, we see how the narratives presented throughout the book culminate in pointing toward the shared and dialogical nature of intercultural situations. Although daily life is indeed laden with power relations, this fact does not obscure the gestures and moments of mutual respect that occur between people as they interact in specific, concrete instances. The authors call our attention to such “agonistic relationships,” a notion used to emphasize the ways in which daily interactions are replete with social and moral ambivalences and do not often conclude in neatly accomplished acts of recognition. Instead, many daily interactions reveal a fraught interplay between identity, social status and the role of moral-theological considerations.

One interesting aspect of the authors’ analysis that emerges but is not quite forthcoming is their observation that accommodation frameworks tend to “de-theologize” (7) people’s experiences. Although they do not engage head-on with the theological aspects of their Muslim respondents’ narratives – perhaps due to their earlier stated concern for avoiding the reproduction of piety discourses and essentialised images of Islam (58) – the authors’ findings point to the relevance of moral-theological discernment in social situations that accommodation frameworks would assume are dominated by concerns for identity and recognition. This is illustrated in cases in which respondents report compromising on certain principles and virtues in order to realise others. For example, in such mundane a situation as purchasing a meal for an IT technician as a gesture of gratitude for exceptional service, a Muslim woman and office manager chose not to invoke halal dietary customs in response to the technician’s choice of pork-based items because performing an act of kindness itself was more important to her in that moment.

Although the authors demonstrate well the effectiveness of their methodological emphasis on personal narratives, there is a disconnect between the opening chapters of the volume and its more theoretical chapters. In the end, one is left wondering what to do analytically with the Muslim figures in relation to the navigation and negotiation model, since the former are invoked primarily as examples of unhelpful essentialisms. Also, the relevance of comparing the ethnographic contexts of Montreal (as metropolis) and St John’s (smaller in scale) is unclear and gets lost as the volume’s main argument develops, particularly in regard to the critique of secularism that undergirds the proposed theoretical framework. The authors’ attention to the rich and complex context of secularism in Quebec – as a particular and localised expression of normative discourses on

pluralism that circulate nationally and even globally – stands alone in the absence of a meaningful treatment of the same in Newfoundland (or anglophone Canada generally). In sum, despite these lacunae, *Beyond Accommodation* offers a useful contrast to the more politically oriented approach of reasonable accommodation. It shows the potential for ethnographic research to highlight the local particularities of secular political discourses and frameworks and, in doing so, to productively critique representations of secular neutrality claims that tend to reproduce a kind of ‘view from nowhere’.

Lemons, Katherine. *Divorcing Traditions: Islamic Marriage Law and the Making of Indian Secularism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019, 232 pages.

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Divorcing Traditions: Islamic Marriage Law and the Making of Indian Secularism is a masterful ethnographic voyage into multiple sites of law that impact divorcing minority Muslims in Delhi, India. Katherine Lemons’s ethnography includes two Hanafi-based *dar ul-qazas* (non-state Islamic legal institutions), a women’s council, a fatwa-granting office and a Sufi healing practice. Divorce serves as a generative site to consider the secular Indian state’s interaction with personal and Islamic law and gender politics. As Lemons demonstrates, divorce represents a major economic and financial rupture for women, their kin, their community and the state. *Talaq ul-ba’in* (unilateral divorce by men, also known as triple *talaq*) raises particular anxieties.

Before turning to the specifics of Lemons’s ethnography, I note *Divorcing Traditions*’ significant contributions to secularism studies. First, Lemons focuses on contemporary India, a context that has received insufficient attention in the English-language literature. Second, Lemons shows the centrality of kinship to secular governance, particularly in how the secular government renders marriage (and divorce) as familial, private and religious. Third, Lemons argues that “Indian secularism brings into question the assumed centrality of the state to secularism” (26). At first glance, *qazis* (judges) and *muftis* (jurists) appear as religious actors and therefore separate from the state, but they too engage in articulating secularism. Finally, Lemons contends that Indian secularism relies on the minority status of Muslims. Religious divorce for Indian Muslim minorities thus renders their religiosity as “the mark of inassimilable difference and an instrument for securing the ostensibly private family as the source of financial support and care” (64). This entrenchment of minority difference means that interreligious solidarity in India is impeded.

The book’s first section, focused on the state, introduces how family disputes among Indian Muslims in Delhi most often involve consultation with a religious legal scholar rather than state court or the registration of complaints with police. In addition to their religious authority – judgments are presented as binding in the eyes of God – *dar ul-qazas* (Islamic law courts) are local and often offer free consultation with fewer intermediaries. Again, while imagined as separate from state legal

adjudication and jurisprudence, Lemons shows how *dar ul-qazas* are entangled with the state. The second chapter examines divorce through the lens of a *mahila panchayat*, an NGO-run women’s council that offers mediation for couples. This space is not part of the state’s formal legal apparatus but draws on legislation on domestic violence as it draws up contracts. Lemons beautifully captures the tension laden in the advice granted by the council, insofar as it typically offers a “pragmatic response to conditions of poverty [for women following divorce] on the one hand, and on the other, the importance of living out one’s desires” (52).

The second section turns to Lemons’s observations of hearings and case files at two *shari’a* courts in two predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods in Delhi. These courts are especially effective in rendering the family as private and as best governed by religious norms. Because of the patriarchal *talaq*, women typically bring forward cases seeking divorce. Lemons offers a feminist analysis in considering how the *qazis* do not spend much time on allegations of violence and notes that the broader tone encourages litigants to reconcile. Ultimately, the “family values” undergirding the cases she examines “privilege a view of women as wives to be protected by marriage [within an] affinal family” (91). Similarly, she notes how the financial and custody arrangements of divorce are addressed in fatwas only if explicitly raised in the request. Around since Independence and protected by laws promoting the freedom of religion, alternate dispute resolution is a key part of the “ideological fiction” of the Indian secular state (101), which Chapter 4 highlights. In actively situating kinship as religiously based, the *dar ul-qazas* reinforce the notion that problems of property and finances are outside state jurisdiction.

The third section describes muftis who grant fatwas and offer spiritual healing, including treatments with amulets and other ritual prescriptions. These services are of interest to the state precisely because they are carried out extrajudicially, but remain authoritative as sources of moral guidance and ethical self-making. Chapter 5 is the heart of this book. It focuses on how muftis respond to different questions posed regarding *talaq ul-ba’in* through fatwas. Lemons analyses 60 fatwas related to divorce copied for her by the mufti. She shares several translated evocative *istiftas* (requests) and the notably short fatwas issued in response. Lemons undertakes fascinating discursive analysis of these questions and judgments’ language (a mixture of Farsi and Arabic) and tone, drawing on speech act theory. She also considers the secularism of these fatwas, an argument she makes with reference to work by Hussein Ali Agrama (2012) on fatwas in Cairo. Here, Lemons brilliantly shows that, in part because fatwa councils cannot be separated from political work, previous scholarship’s assumption of the “secular premise that divorce and reconciliation are private matters that can be separate from the state’s interest in the family” (151) is too simplistic. In contrast, Lemons contends that fatwas in India invoke the secular. Religious law therefore constitutes both religion and law and is part of the practical labour of the secular.

The last chapter introduces the reader to a Sufi healer, Mufti Ahmed. Here, Lemons’s analysis of speech acts takes a captivatingly different turn: she situates the mufti’s metaphor-based speech acts as producing “the relations (*ta’al-luqat*) through which God’s power travels” (171) and that more broadly address not only humans but also *jinn*, the evil eye