

Book Reviews

Abe W. Ata, *Intermarriage between Christians and Muslims*. David Lovel Publishing and The International Centre of Bethlehem, 2000. 102 pp. + Bibliography and Appendix.

This book is a potentially useful and interesting study of intermarriage between Muslims and Christians among Palestinians on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. The study covered 60 couples (120 respondents), who make up the majority of known cases of Muslim-Christian intermarriage there. The study was conducted by interviews and the questions asked included how the couples met, whether an effort was made to convert one spouse to the other spouse's religion, pleasant and unpleasant aspects of an interfaith marriage, attitudes toward raising and schooling of children, attitudes toward gender roles in relation to work and home, and political-cultural identity (do they see themselves primarily as Arab, Palestinian or Muslim/Christian?). The responses are tabulated against such factors as gender, religion, birthplace, length of time married and education.

To my knowledge this is the first study of a group quite like this and should be of interest to a number of scholars. Unfortunately, however, there are so many defects in the presentation that the book is neither a pleasure to read nor easy to use.

There is some information on the methods but I suspect many readers would want more. The results are scattered throughout the book in tables and graphs but are not collected together at any one point for the convenience of the reader. There is an appendix with twelve tables but the relation of these to those in the text is not immediately clear and they are numbered by a different system. There is no index or listing of the tables in the text.

The quality of the writing leaves much to be desired. The author often fails to express himself clearly or to organize his ideas coherently and logically. To give an instance, I still cannot quite make sense of the following: "For example, questions on division of labor and child rearing habits were asked separately to account for many factors apart from gender such as religion and place of residence." (50) Presentation of the results is interspersed with comments that are sometimes rambling and often not immediately related to the subject at hand.

There are quite a number of errors, contradictions and other anomalies. A few examples here will suffice. In the section on methodology we read that "Only one spouse was interviewed from each family" (21), but all of the later figures make it clear that both spouses must have been interviewed. (Perhaps this is why Archbishop Hollingsworth in his Forward states that 120 couples were studied.) Mut'a is called "compassionate marriage" (36), a label I have never seen for it and would hardly give it, and we are not told that it is accepted only by Shi'is, a fact which makes it irrelevant to a study of Palestinians. On page 47 we are told that Muslim weddings do not take

place in mosques but the table on the next page tells us that 11.4% of the weddings of those studied took place in mosques. We are told with no further comment that “Only 3 out of 37 wives do not allow their husband to work.” (76) I would certainly like to know more about those three families! We are told that “custody of children is almost always given to the mother”, something at variance with my understanding of usual Muslim practice. The reference here is given as “Bouquet, 1966, p. 68”, but nothing by Bouquet appears in the bibliography. This is also true of Boudhiba, who is quite frequently cited.

A forcefully wielded editor’s blue pencil would have done much for this book and made its valuable contribution more accessible to potential readers.

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Nicholas De Lange, *An Introduction to Judaism* Cambridge University Press, 2000, ISBN: 0 521 46073 5 (Hardback) 0 521 46624 5 (Paperback) Australian RRP: \$34.95/\$99.00

There is obviously an art to the genre of the ‘introduction’. As recent attempts to introduce to Hinduism have shown, it is the introducer’s duty not only to provide the basics of their subject, but engage the sort of wide-ranging audience who are not prepared to flense their knowledge from reams of plain, academically expert but stodgy expostulation. Klostermaier’s 1999 *Hinduism: A Short History* has all the basics and is well conceived, but Flood’s *An Introduction to Hinduism* of 1996 takes the clear advantage because of this author’s clarity of style and the way he is able to open complex concepts for the reader to examine. It is a much more accessible introduction.

This ease of access coupled to a comprehensive presentation of Judaism was what I was seeking from De Lange’s book. As a visitor to Temple Emmanuel in Eastern Sydney one hears Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins - one of Sydney’s most eloquent and charismatic community leaders - regale visitors with an introduction to Judaism addressing, as he does so well, the question - ‘how could this nation keep itself together without a country for 2000 years.’ His is a dramatic and fascinating tale and listening to Kamins can open one’s eyes to the art of introducing Judaism. Even a moderately enthusiastic introducer has at his or her disposal a vast supply of information and precedents for the presentation of information on Judaism. This may daunt the academic attempting a basic introduction, but it also offers the full potential to both the edification and the delight of the reader. Last year, I sat spellbound as Kamins put Judaism in a very companionable nutshell. Could De Lange do the same?

He starts with a very *gründlich* (from the ground) approach describing the faith as it is today - in essence a very old tradition newly relocated and being at times both the inspiration and the bane of individuals who feel themselves in some way

connected to the historical tradition of a much persecuted people. As a first chapter, DeLange is assuming his audience knows some of the basics of the faith already, or at least assumes the reader does not mind reading through this 'state of Judaism today' exposition before the basics of the faith are revealed. The writing throughout the opening chapters is clear and it is obvious that DeLange is trying to wrestle with a new approach to this religion. It is unfortunate though that the second chapter becomes an investigation of the Zionist movement and details the establishment of Israel - the detail of which would have made a better appearance towards the end of the book. Still, the raw basics of Jewish faith are deferred until DeLange deploys a complicated chapter on various developments of Jewish texts. But as we go, we find that the author is also indulging in a rather unsound technique. DeLange begins to assume that the reader will be most familiar with those parts of Judaism that can be explained through comparisons with Christianity. This is today a troubling assumption, particularly when Professors of Art History at Sydney complain that they must explain the Madonna and Child before discussing Trecento painting, and I find myself teaching second-generation Hari-Krishnas who get excited at the prospect of one day daring to enter a church and perhaps even reading the bible. De Lange's book is already out-of-date for those amongst us who will never use Christianity as a measuring tool for other religious knowledge.

As his chapters continue, he provides a good explanation of family life. This would have been better followed by the chapter on Jewish community; instead, both are divided by a rather wordy chapter on rites of passage. It is only towards the end of the book that such things as worship and concepts of Jehovah are addressed. DeLange has tried to compose a book that leads from the quotidian to the very inner-sanctum of the faith. Perhaps I am unjust in assuming that there are certain basics of a faith that are more central, but a student needing an introduction is going to find himself or herself disappointed with a book that meanders around such information. Perhaps De Lange's schema makes the end of the book more profound because of the journey the reader has had to make to get to this ideal core of the faith, but it is too long a journey and I do not really get the point. A general reader without a broad knowledge of Christianity would find him or herself lost with this book at times. De Lange's practical approach was at first exciting. Certainly, in his style he often achieves great clarity, but the structure of the book means that as a good general introduction it fails and I would be wary of recommending it to Higher School Certificate candidates and first year university students. Let us hope that one day Rabbi Kamins can be encouraged to put his snappy words onto the page, delivered, as they would be, from an Australian perspective, they would be warmly welcomed.

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Mark Epstein, *Going on Being: Buddhism and the Way of Change: A Positive Psychology for the West*, London, Continuum, 2001, pp 225, \$45.00

“Do you see them,” Ram Dass began, and then he paused. The breeze blew through his silence. “Already free,” he murmured, as I strained just a bit to make sure I was hearing him properly. It took me a moment to put together what he was asking me, it was the only time that afternoon that I had trouble understanding him.

“Do I see my patients as already free?”

Ram Dass nodded. (p.13).

So begins the basis for Mark Epstein’s exploration of the potentially positive roles of Buddhism for Western psychology. *Going on Being* is a largely autobiographical account of Epstein’s journey to transform his mind and apply this to his psychiatric practice. The book conveys his own experiences of enlightenment and provides narrative accounts of encounters with the renowned Ram Dass who transformed from academic psychologist to spiritual teacher, Jack Kornfield who had the obverse transition from a Buddhist monk to psychotherapy, and *Insight Meditation Society’s* co-founder Joseph Goldstein. In this respect the book provides wonderful insight into the relationship of psychology in the West and Buddhism according to both Epstein and some of the infamous teachers from the 1970s.

Going on Being details the nature of the human condition from a Buddhist perspective, accessible to a wide readership. It is relevant to a wide audience at a time when mental illnesses and disorders have become plagues of the Western World and Western psychology’s desire to seek freedom, truth or the core solution to life’s problems itself contributes to our fears and anxieties.

The book proclaims that therapeutic practices in the West develop the means to seek freedom *from* our fears, rather than an acceptance of them. There is, as Epstein tells us, a need to “reconnect with awareness that is already there” (p.13). This is about moving beyond the Western thinking pattern of the self as isolated parts, contained and in search of freedom. Buddhism, for Epstein expounds a way of being free *with* our fears, seeing the interconnectedness of the whole and understanding that we are already free.

Epstein’s personal story of transformation is intermeshed with accounts from his experiences with patients, classical textual material from some diverse Buddhist schools of thought, meetings with spiritual teachers and large references to Freud’s psychology. The diversity of this material means that there is bound to be something for everyone in its reading, and perhaps something to annoy everyone as well. For the novice reader of Freud, Epstein does well to introduce him in a friendly light more readily concerned with Freud’s conception of spirit and ideas on instinct. Epstein links Freud’s “attempts to excavate the self” with the Buddha’s teachings, which are not “about building up the self but seeing through it” (p.42). This is important as both an insight into Buddhism and provides a glimpse at one of the major causes of suffering in the West, our concern with “social identity” (p.42).

The book offers an accessible, yet detailed account, of the basic precepts of Buddhist practice providing readers with rich ethical guidance for doing and being therapy. This guidance and insight can be either for readers who are interested in personal transformation or practitioners, but as Epstein's book indicates, for the awakened mind these are both one and the same. Epstein captures the sense of fragmentation that we as humans experience from each other and mostly from our own selves, introducing us to British child analyst D. W. Winnicott's concept of "going on being", "which means the uninterrupted flow of authentic self" (p.30). His book enables the reader to develop the sense of spirit that Freud saw as given. "Spirit is everything" is what Freud tells Binswanger. In a personal conversation where Binswanger asks about spiritual deficiency and how this may have led to a lack of spiritual communication in healing, Freud replies, "mankind (sic) has always known that it possesses spirit" (p.2), but as Epstein rightly understands "sometimes we forget" about spirit all together (p.3). As we journey through the text we see how the practice of meditation can restore the self or, in the words of Tibetan Lama Sogyol Rinpoche "bring one home", to the self.

Epstein's accounts span an entire lifetime demonstrating to the reader that change is an ongoing process and a lifelong journey. This book will be of interest to a variety of readers. For the scholar, teacher or practitioner interested in the influence of Buddhism in the West it is very informative. It also contains historical and personal information for those interested in New Religious Movements and a wealth of biographical and autobiographical information on matters concerning identity and self. His text allows for a deeper exploration of the actual route to happiness, where other texts tend to get trapped in analysis of the concept.

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***Robin Gill, Churchgoing and Christian Ethics, Cambridge University Press
1999, i-xiii + 277pp. \$44.95.***

This is a very important book and I recommend it to anyone interested in the current relationship between religion (specifically churchgoing) and ethics (expressed attitudes to moral issues). Gill begins with a careful review of virtue ethics focussing on the problem usually encountered – while churches may be repositories of moral ideas they are themselves so ethically compromised as to be unlikely sources of ethical behaviour. He then points out that sociologists of religion tend to view churchgoing as either inconsequential or negatively so. Using a vast amount of well managed empirical evidence Gill lays both of these 'biases' to rest and argues for churchgoing to be taken seriously as a highly explanatory independent variable in the analysis of

the relationship between religion and ethics.

Gill's argument is that attending church and Sunday school provides the socialisation context for learning Christian beliefs. Against the secularisationists who argue that a decline in beliefs has led to a decline in participation Gill marshals evidence from the UK, Europe and Australia to demonstrate quite convincingly that the relationship is the reverse. Against those who argue for a persistence of religious belief and practice in a context of secularisation Gill demonstrates that the persistence is largely an echo of past church involvement and is unlikely to persist. Against those who argue the case for a separation of belief and belonging Gill notes that this too is merely an echo of previous belonging – he cannot find evidence of practice among those who did not at some time 'belong'.

Eliminating these explanations leaves room for what Gill's terms a cultural explanation – churchgoing provides the opportunity for socialisation into Christian beliefs. This is best achieved in childhood. He ransacks a large number of excellent data sets to demonstrate that churchgoers are different from non-attenders and that those who went but go no more are more like those who go than those who do not. Churchgoing is thus essential for the development of Christian ethics regardless of the flaws of churches.

I am convinced by the data he adduces to support his view. Churchgoing is causally related to holding Christian beliefs. I am disappointed that he calls this a cultural rather than a sociological theory. I am much more disappointed that he continues to hold to the old rationalist enlightenment view that beliefs cause behaviour. He has no data on behaviours, and very limited data on reported behaviours. I have long argued, following Weber, that religious communities are not only the source of beliefs but also the source of behaviours and of ideas about how they are related. A proper sociological model sees not just beliefs but the whole belief / behaviour nexus as a product of socialisation in a group. The group teaches what to say and what to do and enforces both right speaking and right behaving and gives cultural – in the case of churches theological – legitimacy to the pattern of both belief and behaviour it teaches. Beliefs, especially abstract theologies, do not automatically, or magically infer behaviours. But this is really just to extend Gill's basic argument to cover both beliefs and behaviours. Gill's argument and carefully adduced data redeems the sociology of religion by restoring an aspect of religious life to an independent rather than dependent variable. For this I am enormously grateful.

Two further issues concern me. First, while the data describing churchgoers as distinct from non-goers is convincing I suspect it is due in part to the fact that as churchgoing declines churchgoers become increasingly different from the majority of the population, increasingly a deviant minority. The differences may or may not be identifiably Christian, but they will, I predict, be those of conventionalist, lower-middle class personal morality – against sex, drugs and rock and roll. Secondly, while several data sets note strong differences between Christian denominations Gill pays scant attention to them. His theory should indicate that going to one church or another

will make a difference if it is socialisation that matters. There are differences and they are not trivial. But if churchgoers what ever the church attended are more alike than those who attend less we will be looking for another explanation that that Gill prefers.

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Graham Harvey, ed., *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*, 2000, London and New York, Cassell. 302pp bibl indexes, ISBN 0-304-70448-2 pbk.

A collection attempting to contain the diversity of the world's 'indigenous religions', risks creating the impression that there is a special type of religious belief shared by indigenous people that is essentially different from that of other peoples. One might also question why particular aspects of indigenous life should be separated out and farmed off to the study of 'religion', when few indigenous peoples structure their lives into discrete 'religious', 'political', or 'economic' domains. Most indigenous languages do not even have a specific term for 'religion'. Anticipating these questions, the Companion's editor, Graham Harvey, stakes a claim for the previously marginalised study of 'indigenous religions' by arguing that the lack of a word for 'religion' does not mean that indigenous belief systems are not 'religious' or that indigenous people lack religious feeling. Harvey admits that the generic term 'indigenous religion' is an imprecise label for a range of different human activities, however he claims that there is enough common ground between the experiences of indigenous peoples, and between belief systems, to justify the label. In any case, without such generalisations to link disparate activities, academic study would leave a large part of human belief and practice unexamined and undervalued. Indeed, examining indigenous beliefs as 'religions' offers an "exciting challenge...to prevalent (Western) academic concepts of and approaches to 'religion'" (7).

The overall approach taken in this anthology is to sidestep the problems associated with an impossibly broad field, by offering what is essentially a sampler. This is a volume with no pretensions to being definitive, but which instead offers a range of themes and case studies intended to stimulate further interest in indigenous religiosity. The book's seventeen chapters are divided into three parts. 'Persons' contains papers broadly relating to human (and non-human) encounters, roles and activities, 'Powers' suggests the powers enabling and constraining action, while 'Gifts' evokes indigenous activities expressing the relationships and exercise of power contained in giving and sharing. These categories are intended to be suggestive rather than categorical distinctions, however their sometimes tenuous connection to each essay's subject does not make them an especially helpful guide through the Companion's contents.

Each contributor takes up a theme or issue relating to indigenous practice and/or belief. These are treated in a variety of ways and include descriptive case studies, comparative essays, and theoretical analyses. Running through this diversity is a common emphasis on gently introducing major problems, arguments, and methods in the study of indigenous religions and societies. This introductory approach is most evident in chapters - such as Piers Vitebsky's overview of shamanism - which describe particular indigenous practices. Peter Mataira's essay serves a similar function in outlining the concepts of *mana* and *tapu* in classical Maori society. One of a number of indigenous contributors writing about their own traditions, Mataira argues that colonial observers frequently misdescribed indigenous concepts, and that *tapu*, rather than a negative transgression, should be understood as the sacred boundaries of a person, place or thing dedicated to a particular god or creator. *Mana* on the other hand, can be expressed as the "endowment of spiritual power given by the Creator" (112).

Other authors illustrate particular methods in the study of indigenous religions using case studies. Jan Platvoet's chapter opens with a general discussion of spirit possession before illustrating the range of analytical methods applicable to an analysis of a spirit possession recorded in West Africa in the 1920s. In a similar vein, Charlotte Hardman summarises some of the different approaches to the study of ritual before applying these techniques to a specific case study. Hardman confirms the enduring value of Arnold van Gennep by applying his work on 'rites of passage', and their role in socialisation, to the birth and marriage rites of the Lohorung Rai of East Nepal.

A theme common to many of the essays is the undifferentiated nature of religious life in many indigenous societies; for many people, the division of the natural from the supernatural, the secular from the religious, is meaningless. Berel Dov Lerner grapples with the problem of correctly identifying what beliefs can usefully be called 'religious', when revisiting Evans-Pritchard's old stamping grounds amongst the Azande and the Nuer. She notes that magic in Azande society is not only used as an explanation for almost any natural or chance event, but is frequently employed for ends that are not *recognisably* spiritual. James Cox makes a similar point in identifying the pragmatic and materialistic nature of most religious practice as one of the essential features persistent throughout all indigenous religious expression in Zimbabwe. However, although his identification of particular 'essential' features is persuasive, Cox does not engage with the potential problems of such generalisations becoming traps for analysis - with empirical evidence selectively mobilised to fit each apparently enduring characteristic.

Many of the most interesting chapters in the book exhibit a salutary awareness of the contemporary character of indigenous religions. With no indigenous society entirely untouched by 'modernity', change in indigenous religions is as inevitable as it is in other areas of indigenous life. Fiona Bowie, in her chapter on witchcraft amongst the Bangwa of Cameroon, draws on rich ethnographic research to challenge any idea that indigenous beliefs are static. Using extracts from her field notes, Bowie shows

the flexible, and historically located, nature of Bangwa notions of witchcraft. Like Cox and Lerner, she also draws attention to the integration of magic and religion into daily life, noting that Bangwa beliefs about witchcraft are a “necessary concomitant of power and success, spoken of openly and acknowledged as a fact of life, as ordinary as breathing or eating” (68). Rather than being subsumed by Christianity, the market economy, and modern health care, beliefs about witchcraft have been applied to the problems of modernity and remain a vital instrument in the way Bangwa people explain the world and their place in it.

Charles D. Thompson Jnr. also examines the role of change in his sophisticated analysis of the Jakalteko Maya’s ‘Dance of the Conquest’. Thompson demonstrates how the dance, introduced by the Spanish in the Sixteenth Century, has continually evolved as a performance that layers multiple histories and indigenous identity. The dance, although depicting past events, remains relevant to people in the present by re-enacting colonial conquest, and indigenous hardship, at the same time as expressing the continuity of indigenous existence.

Particularly interesting, as well as stimulating the desire for more an in-depth examination, are papers by Lynne Hume and Terri Brewer on the indigenous reshaping of traditions in the creation of contemporary indigenous identity. Lynne Hume’s chapter discusses the evolution, and increasingly flexible nature, of ‘the Dreaming’ concept in contemporary Australian Aboriginal life. She argues that contemporary Aboriginal spirituality is best viewed from the vantage point of “interstitial cultural space” (138), with people constructing meaning from a variety of cultural sources and group identities. In her historically well-grounded essay on the Native American Powwow, Terri Brewer similarly analyses the growth of a practice from specific regional origins – like the Dreaming it was popularised through an inaccurate English translation – to a virtually continent-wide “incrementally re-invented tradition” (258), with a variety of contemporary meanings.

Such a wide-ranging collection is bound to be somewhat variable in quality and ambition, however for the most part it serves its purpose of introducing the reader to a range of indigenous traditions. I did find the concern of some contributors, especially the editor, to challenge supposedly ‘Western’ misconceptions about indigenous religion to be admirable but ultimately repetitive and unhelpful. Perhaps inevitably in a volume of papers trying to introduce the reader to indigenous religious traditions in a short space, a few too many contributors tend towards over-generalisation, and the ‘timeless present’, in their descriptions of what a particular people ‘do’ or think. Nevertheless, the volume’s diversity of approaches, and the accessible style of most of the essays, make it a useful text for undergraduate students and a good starting point for those wishing to further explore particular themes or cultural forms.

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Abdullah Saeed & Shahram Akbarzadeh, eds., *Muslim Communities in Australia*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2001. 244 pp, bibliography and index. Price: A\$ 44.95.

In the last half century the number of Muslims living in Western countries, either permanently as a result of migration or temporarily for study or other purposes, has grown rapidly, to the point where these Muslims represent a significant element in the world-wide Muslim population and also significant elements in many of the countries to which they have moved. In the case of Australia, Muslims have been present in small numbers since before European settlement but have come in significant numbers only since the late 1960s. According to the 1996 census, they numbered over 200,000 or 1.1 percent of the Australian population and some would put the number as high as 300,000 today.

This volume, consisting of eleven chapters mostly by Australian academics, provides a significant addition to our knowledge of these Muslims as well as a convenient access to information already available elsewhere. Slightly more than half of the authors appear to be Muslims themselves.

The introduction, by the editors, highlights several issues connected with identity and gives a broad definition of its subject, which appears to be used throughout the volume, "all people who have at least some form of cultural affiliation with Islam are considered to be Muslim" (6)

The first three chapters deal with the Muslim community in a general way. Bilal Cleland (ch. 1) provides a good, basic account of the history of Muslims in Australia from the days of the Afghan camel drivers in the 19th century and Malay fisherman even earlier to the present, with primary attention to the period before 1970. Michael Humphrey (ch. 2) discusses the effect of Australian multiculturalism and secularism on Muslim identity and the ways this identity is expressed and negotiated. Gary Bouma, Joan Daw and Riffat Munawar (ch. 3) discuss the Australian cultural context in which Muslims find themselves and the various ways in which they deal with this context and with their own diversity.

The next two chapters deal with women's issues. Samina Yasmeen (ch. 4), drawing on two surveys in Perth, discusses settlement needs of Muslim women. She points out that the immediate needs of women when they arrive are not identical to those of men and have been relatively neglected. Zahra Kamalkhani (ch. 5) effectively and forcefully uses case studies to describe the situation and problems of refugee women, both pre- and post-arrival.

The next two chapters deal with education. Irene Donohue Clyne (ch. 6) discusses Muslim attitudes toward educational issues, and canvasses four kinds of options that Muslims have for their children's education, including sending them to Islamic school and three ways of relating to state schools. Christine Asmar (ch. 7) discusses university students. After noting the difficulty in getting an accurate count of Muslim students, she presents information based on interviews with 28 students,

covering such matters such as identity, discrimination, meeting religious needs and relations with other Muslims, on and off-campus.

The remaining chapters deal with a variety of topics. Jamila Hussain (ch 8) provides a particularly informative discussion of the differing Australian and Muslim ideas and values relating to marriage and other family matters and shows how Australian law in this area impacts on Muslims. Abdullah Saeed (ch. 9) provides a good basic description of Islamic banking and discusses the operations of the one Islamic financial institution in Australia, the Muslim Community Cooperative of Australia (recently become the Muslim Community Credit Union), drawing extensively on interviews with its CEO. H. V. Brasted (ch. 10) describes the presentation of Islam in the Australian press over the last fifty years in terms of four stages. While this presentation has been largely unbalanced and stereotypical, the reason is not so much Edward Said's "orientalism" as the nature of journalism itself, which privileges what is dramatic and shocking. In a brief closing chapter (ch. 11), Shahram Akhbarzadeh identifies three phases of Muslim identity development in Australia, with ethnic identity primary in the present phase.

One thing which this volume lacks, in my view, is a substantial historical and organizational study which would provide an adequate framework for the more targeted chapters. The first chapter accomplishes this to some degree, but it would have been helpful if it had provided more detail on the last thirty years. Even so, the volume provides a series of interesting "takes" on Muslims in Australia that will be useful to anyone interested in Muslims, or immigrant and ethnic groups more generally, in Australia, and also to those interested in Muslims living as minorities in the West, a topic on which there is a growing body of literature, to which this volume is a worthy addition.

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