

Book and film reviews

Coping with change

BENTHALL, JONATHAN. *Islamic charities and Islamic humanism in troubled times*. x, 215 pp., figs, bibliogr. Manchester: Univ. Press, 2016. £75.00 (cloth)

This book, as the author notes, is a collection of seventeen previously published articles and book reviews with an original introduction and very brief afterword. Its value lies in bringing together a range of contributions on Islamic charities, which would be difficult to access, with what Jonathan Benthall labels 'Islamic humanism'. The articles in the first part examine Islamic charities worldwide, and in the Arab Gulf states, Britain, Indonesia, Mali, Palestine, and the United States, including the denial of a US visa to the Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan because of donations he had made to a Palestinian charity.

The articles and reviews in the second part of *Islamic charities and Islamic humanism in troubled times* focus on the role of religious tolerance. Chapter 10 especially reviews several previous studies by historians and anthropologists. Benthall concludes that 'Islam has proved to be just as flexible as Christianity in accommodating popular forms of belief and practice' (p. 148), although it could equally well be said that Islam has been as intolerant of sects within it and other faiths as has Christianity and most other religions. The books reviewed include studies of religious persecution, America's war on terror, and the historical link between religion and violence. Among the individuals discussed are the Muslim scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi, widely recognized as 'the most influential religious authority in the

Sunni Muslim world' (p. 181), the controversial Swiss/Egyptian scholar Tariq Ramadan, and the Shi'a Muslim anthropologist Akbar Ahmed. Benthall praises Ahmed's *The thistle and the drone* (2013) for breaking out of anthropology's 'sectarian enclave' (p. 176), which only treats spirituality at the margins. No mention is made of Ahmed's justification for an 'Islamic anthropology', or of the fact that the strength of cultural anthropology as a discipline is that it does not set out from an a priori religious starting point. The notion of tribal Islam is problematic for a discipline that views the term 'tribe' just as heuristically useless as 'primitive'. The expression, despite its attempt to counter the stereotypes of Islam as inherently violent, only makes Islam seem more aggressive and incapable of being modern.

One of the longer reviews discusses Michael Cook's *Ancient religions, modern politics* (2014), which is rightly considered 'masterly imaginative scholarship' (p. 157). Cook's book provides an historical survey of several religions, comparing Islam to Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism on the topics of jihad and reform. The review contrasts Cook's apolitical approach with Akeel Bilgrami's *Secularism, identity, and enchantment* (2014), which challenges Western scholars to confront 'the wrongs of the US government and its allies' (p. 162) just as they oppose Islamic absolutism. Benthall chides Cook for ignoring Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) and not having a 'touch of post-Saidian reflexivity' (p. 163). The suggestion is that Cook should identify his motives, given how his work could reverberate in the mass media and be used for political ends. However, Cook is not the Orient-bashing scholar depicted by Said and there is no need to justify the kind of sound historical scholarship he writes.

representing actual behaviour and attitudes since individuals interpret and engage with their societies' gender norms in terms of their own positionality, needs, and yearnings while nevertheless being constrained by the penalties they and their families might face as a result of perceptible deviance.

Several chapters – the introduction, chapters 4 (N.J. Smith-Hefner), 5 (G. Pathak), and 8 (A. Begim) – refer to Inhorn's concept of 'emergent masculinities' to depict men engaged in new kinds of gendered performances, demonstrating that 'real men' can still show love and caring. However, this concept implies neither a diminishing of the influence of religion nor its rejection. On the contrary, emergent masculinities are described in several chapters as associated with increased religiosity. Indeed, a deeper engagement with Islam at the expense of local norms is revealed as affording men closer and more emotionally meaningful relationships with their wives and children. This is demonstrated, for instance, in both A. Chioyenda's story of the Pashtun Baryalay (chap. 3) and N.J. Smith-Hefner's account of educated Javanese youths who embrace both Islam and newly emergent ways of being men who support their womenfolk's education, relate to them primarily with love, and largely eschew the image of a dominant Muslim patriarch.

Another important message arising from the book is the diversity of life experiences and situations faced by Muslim men from different parts of the world, along with a wide variety of ways of handling them. This reinforces the idea that Muslims do not form a monolithic group and should be viewed as at least as disparate as Christians in their everyday interpretations of religion and performances of masculinity. *Reconceiving Muslim men* makes a welcome addition to the growing body of literature on Muslim men, an excellent companion volume to the more theoretical discussions of masculinity, which largely focus on Western contexts, and a useful reminder of the need to differentiate between discourse and practice in exploring gender issues more broadly.

COLLETTE HARRIS SOAS University of London

PACHECO DE OLIVEIRA, JOÃO. *O nascimento do Brasil e outros ensaios: 'pacificação', regime tutelar e formação de alteridades*. 362 pp., maps, tables, illus., bibliogr. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa, 2016. R\$ 64.00 (paper)

João Pacheco de Oliveira is a senior researcher recognized as a leading figure in historical

anthropology and Brazilian ethnology. His agenda has aspired towards an understanding of indigenous life in Brazil, both based on the complexities of historical events and the struggles of Indigenous peoples with the nation-state. The volume *O nascimento do Brasil e outros ensaios* (*The birth of Brazil and other essays*) should be understood as a consolidation of Pacheco de Oliveira's life-long contributions.

The book's nine chapters, collected from different sources, do not follow a clear chronological order. The last one, 'Pacification and the military tutelary regime in the management of peoples and territories', makes an historical connection between previous centuries of Brazilian colonization and more current debates related to the violent police occupation of Rio de Janeiro's favelas. The connector used in this broad temporal analysis is the category of 'pacification', which the author contends is an administrative concept deployed by the state in order to control internal populations considered to be different from the norm. From the state's point of view, both Indigenous peoples and favela dwellers are 'deviants' in need of pacification. Nevertheless, this is not actually a peaceful process, since it involves the use of aggressive state police-military power, as the author observes.

The remaining eight chapters offer more general discussions that provide an historical revision of narratives related to the birth of Brazil as a nation, always challenging widespread understandings of Indigenous peoples as minor agents in the genesis of the country (chap. 1). In-depth historical data regarding the formation of the Amazon region are presented in chapters 3 and 4, along with an important reminder that what we currently recognize as one country was once divided into two Portuguese Americas: one was the colony known as Brazil, with its capital located in Salvador da Bahia, another was known as the colony of Maranhão e Grão-Pará, with its capital in the Amazonian city of Belém. Pacheco de Oliveira argues that the implications of this complex historical configuration in relation to the emergence of Brazil, and even to ethnological assumptions, are deeper than it is assumed.

Different 'alterity regimes' appear as key analytical concepts at many points throughout the book. In chapter 2, for example, Pacheco de Oliveira presents a detailed discussion of the regime known as 'indigenism', an approach with evolutionary connotations through which the state acquired the authority to manage a supposedly savage Amerindian population. Chapter 6 is focused on the origins of the

'tutelary regime' and in chapters 5, 7, and 8 we are introduced to new 'alterity regimes', which have in common the more active participation of Indigenous peoples in their own political representation. Chapter 5 is the most robust, providing an excellent introduction to the concept of indigenous ethnogenesis, taking seriously and theorizing the re-emergence of Indigenous groups previously considered decimated, a topic of utmost importance in current political debates, and full of theoretical potential for future anthropological discussion. One of the main strengths of *O nascimento do Brasil*, and of Pacheco de Oliveira's style of ethnology, is the constant emergence of themes that prove to be relevant for contemporary politics: from his analysis of territorialization and flux, connected to an investigation of the state, to issues of ethnicity and colonialism.

The preface and some chapters of the manuscript, however, promise more than they actually deliver. Chapter 4, for instance, does not build significantly on existing debates regarding the concept of frontier. More serious, perhaps, is the lack of ethnographic material derived from Pacheco de Oliveira's own fieldwork. Instead, the author relies heavily on the findings of other anthropologists: particularly on the work of researchers from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) and other institutions on questions related to 'ethnogenesis'; and, within his own department at Museu Nacional (UFRJ), on the work of the anthropologist Antônio Carlos de Souza Lima on pacification, for example.

For anthropologists who expect long-term and intimate research with a single group, Pacheco de Oliveira's volume may feel too broad. His way out of this potential critique has been to claim that he practises 'an historical anthropology'. Indeed, his approach towards historical multiplicities is valuable. Pacheco de Oliveira proves to be ambitious in proposing an alternative interpretation of Brazilian history, one in which Indigenous peoples are at the forefront of struggles that gave birth to the largest nation in Latin America.

MOISES LINO E SILVA *The Federal University of Bahia*
– UFBA

VATUK, SYLVIA. *Marriage and its discontents: women, Islam and the law in India*. xviii, 273 pp., tables, bibliogr. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2017. Rs. 650 (cloth)

This is a collection of eight essays previously published on religion, law, and marriage in India,

with a new introduction by the author. The collection is welcome, as it brings together some of Sylvia Vatuk's important interventions, highlighting the depth, nuance, and range of the research. She has chosen to present the essays, first published between 2001 and 2015, in chronological order of publication, which lends *Marriage and its discontents* pedagogical value and depth, as it demonstrates how a research project unfolds.

The greatest strength of the collection lies in the data Vatuk musters about women's experiences with Muslim Personal Law (MPL). With her characteristic frankness, the author writes that she turned her attention to MPL 'due to an increasing unease with the prevailing tendency of the popular ... literature, to account for most of the social disabilities under which Muslim women suffer by reference to the personal law regime by which they are governed' (p. vii). Vatuk set out to find out whether, in fact, the particular entailments of MPL – polygyny, unilateral divorce, and religion-specific maintenance laws – are the primary source of hardship for women. Each chapter moves beyond the information available in legal statutes, and High and Supreme Court judgments, to offer data about how Muslim women navigate lower civil courts and non-state *dar ul-qaza* (shari'a courts). Vatuk's analysis is based on an impressive range of sources, including interviews with judges and *qazis* (Islamic judges), litigants, lawyers, and activists; family and shari'a court case archives; observations of hearings; and newspapers. Most of the research was conducted in Chennai and Hyderabad, complemented by some data on Delhi.

The findings are striking, overturning numerous truisms about Muslim women's experiences of personal law. Vatuk finds, first, that Muslim women's experiences in civil courts differ little from those of women governed by other personal laws and, furthermore, that whether their cases are heard in civil or religious courts, the logic according to which their cases are heard is overwhelmingly paternalistic: 'legal discourse of "rights" ... transformed into a discourse of "welfare"' (p. 76). Secondly, her research shows that in spite of panic about unilateral male divorce (triple *talaq*), Muslim women frequently initiate divorce by *khul'* (which requires the husband's consent), exhibiting a willingness to exercise their rights. At the same time, and this is another hallmark of Vatuk's work, she does not draw triumphalist conclusions but shows that *khul'* is at once an important legal avenue for women and limited, as the divorcing husband must agree to