

'brownie' in Fauset's hands. For instance, the neologism of the 'brownie' that had a history of cultural associations (from a benevolent spirit in folklore to a symbol of US imperialism and finally to British scout heroism) is rediscovered and recreated into a newer range of meanings. Lahiri carefully denoted how this effort at 'transcreation' becomes central to generate an interpretative community of readers that meditate on identity and politics from a perspective of heightened agency and against what Barthes would call 'lisibility'. Lahiri is brilliant in her analysis of Du Bois' *The Dark Princess* that narrates the union of an upper caste Hindu woman to a black man from the United States and the 'scriptable' future of their coloured child. In this, Du Bois not only talks about racial concerns in the West but tries to understand the politics of the East in terms of caste and colour (he uses 'caste-colour' as a new term altogether), thus opening up channels of solidarity that would mean a more international approach to oppression as a social phenomenon. This notion of solidarity is heightened in Du Bois' association with Lala Lajpat Rai and his exchanges with Du Bois. Lahiri, thus, presents a rigorous and in depth study of several uncommon politics of and in print.

Lahiri's concern with the past is but only to propose a comradeship for the present and the future. She is commendable with her research and her detailed depiction of minute instances in favour of her proposition. As I had attempted to read her engagement to read in terms of anticipation and excesses, Lahiri perhaps gives a strong voice to her mind in her deliberate but beautiful textual strategy in connecting topographies through a shared individual (Nivedita, Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi, Schlesin, Du Bois, Fauset, and Lajpat Rai) and a growing readership that might be deeply connected (as in the case of Du Bois and the Indian situation), middlingly warm (as for Tagore) or completely unintended (like Gandhi's case). Probably, the author shares her anticipation of a world where reading (textually and in quotidian terms) raises a spirit of solidarity with or without a politics of intention; where politics itself redeems itself in readership and companionship, where intention is relegated to the old order and politics of reading is in itself a liberating exercise; Lahiri anticipates scholarship that reads the world where literary intention is more scriptable and open to possibilities, to solidarities imperfect but none the less solidarities of the common and thus a function of the messianic.

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ISLAM AND ASIA: A HISTORY. By Chiara Formichi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 348 pp.

What is the relationship between Asia and Islam? How far back do their roots and acquaintanceship go? In *Islam and Asia: A History* (2020), Chiara Formichi answers these questions by not only decolonizing knowledge on the spread and role of Islam in and across Asia but also highlighting the role women played in this expansion: thus bringing to the reader's attention an often disregarded key element to the building of nations and the spread of a global religion. Formichi slowly unravels widely held dominant views of the influence of Islam on a global scale by offering a transregional approach as to why and how Asia and Islam are counterparts in their respective histories and developments. Formichi challenges the often considered dominance of the Middle East in Islamic development. The author brings to light a key component in the development of the global religion, Asia, and argues that the interactions between society and religion have resulted in a change in global Islamic practices. The thematically divided chapters are approached with strokes that move from the macro to the micro: covering territory and chronology, and social, religious, economic and political transformations. Beginning from the

7th century and leading up to the 1990s, the chapters, while appearing to cover a wide breadth of knowledge, are selective and purposeful in their information: Formichi chooses to focus on the locales that intervene and serve her thematic purposes well. Thus, her disclaimer in the preface sets the tone for the book and invites readers not to take this work as an “encyclopedia.” Formichi distances herself, rightfully, from providing an all-inclusive book on histories too wide and long to be contained in a single piece of work: “Hence, whereas I have attempted a balanced coverage of Asia’s subregions – defined as Central, South, East, and Southeast – with relevant references to the Muslim Mediterranean, this book is by no means a complete survey of “Islam” in each and every polity/nation in “Asia” (xii). Formichi’s theoretical contribution is critical and vital, especially in the current era: she places at the forefront, the aim to bridge together two fields rarely put together: Islamic Studies and Asian Studies. Combined beautifully in this book, these two fields enrich one another and open up new pathways to consider the past, present, and future of both fields: as separate and combined.

Alongside riveting case studies, Formichi’s writing excels and shines most at the level of writing and engagement with readers. With further readings, contexts, and background information beautifully integrated into her text, Formichi speaks not only to the critic or researcher in the field but also to the new reader encountering the topics at hand for the first time. The opening pages indicate that the book is dedicated to her students, and up until the final pages, Formichi delivers a resource students from all fields can use. Furthermore, her explanations on the (problematics of) translation and concluding remarks at the end of each chapter equip her text with both the ease and comfort readers from all backgrounds can appreciate. This book is a great toolbox to further navigate the wide topic of Islam and Asia. Perhaps one of the strongest elements of her work is the detailed attention paid to the Arabic words, religious terms, and historical figures. By providing “box[es]” that interrupt the flow of the text, Formichi emphasizes the need to understand the context behind the discussion before proceeding any further: this accessibility strengthens Formichi’s text.

Islam and Asia illustrates the active nature of religion, cultures, borders, and society. It transforms once presumed fixed entities, into areas of networks, trade, change, and advancement in the dissemination of knowledge in every sphere, from social to political. Formichi, in her own words, brings us to “reflect on how 1,400 years after Muhammad received the first revelation in Mecca, the perceived “syncretic” and “peripheral” Southeast Asia can be regarded as breeding grounds for new interpretative paths” (262). From the Islamic call from 7th century Arabia to the development of a global religion in the 1990s, Formichi’s text traces the large magnitude of this spread, noting the changes in society and the impact of/on religion in Asia. Thus, although not an encyclopedic rendition of the spread of Islam, this book is great for those wanting to get a good understanding of the effect and role of religion in shaping histories, borders, and society with the vital and often disregarded discussion of the role of women in these exchanges.

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FROM OBSCURITY TO LIGHT: WOMEN IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ORISSA (SEVENTH TO TWELFTH CENTURIES AD). By Devika Rangachari. London and New York: Routledge, 2020. 272 p.

“I learnt history as unquestionably as I did geography, without ever dreaming that there could be more than one view of past events.”

– Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*