

Book Review

GIULIA LIBERATORE, *Somali, Muslim, British: Striving in Securitized Britain*. London: Bloomsbury. 2017, 305 pp. (pb £28.99).

This monograph is a timely response to the increased scrutiny of Muslim women in Britain, particularly in relation to questions around belonging, identity, and religiosity amid the concurrent rise of securitisation policies, anti-multiculturalism, and Islamophobia. Growing anti-Muslim sentiment after 9/11 and the July 2005 London bombings has created a rhetoric of Islam's incompatibility with universal liberal values and British National identity. Somalis, in particular, have been labeled as 'segregated, underachieving and a threat to cohesion and security' (p. 2). It is valuable therefore to find work that prioritises Somali Muslim women's voices and lived experiences. Based on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in London, Giulia Liberatore's *Somali, Muslim, British: Striving in Securitized Britain* describes how Somali women challenge ideas of 'difference' and 'belonging' through how they make sense of work, marriage, raising children, and managing personal crises. Drawing on Henrietta Moore's (2011) concept of 'ethical imagination', as a human capacity, a mode through which subjectivities are formed and transformed in relation to self and others, Liberatore proposes the concept of 'aspiration' to ask 'what it means to be Muslim, black and female in the British context' (p. 3). The book explores how this question shapes Somali women's imaginings of themselves and others as well as their engagement with a range of religious texts, projects, debates, and forms of public culture, including their relationship with God. Liberatore presents a nuanced account of the ways Somali

Muslim women in London adapt personally and socially to create meaning in their lives and envision alternatives to a securitised Britain.

Central to the book is its critical engagement with the debate surrounding the rise of religiosity and Muslim identity among young people in Europe within the context of their experiences of discrimination and deprivation. The discourse around Islam's gradual secularisation and critical interaction with modern Europe fails to adequately account for contemporary and historical encounters between Muslim societies and Europe, anti-imperialist struggles, and models of transformation within Muslim traditions themselves, which are precipitating changes to Islamic religiosity, practice, and institutions. Liberatore examines how multiple generations of Somali women engage with Islamic revivalist movements, which call for 'purifying Islam from local customs' to instead align with its perceived core foundation through embodied practices of piety, ritual, prayer, and veiling (p. 9). The women in this study are not simply adapting Islam to fit the British context, they are productively problematising belonging, difference, and citizenship and opposing the binary of 'Islamic versus secular'. Previous studies, Liberatore argues, present a coherent, bounded, and unilinear course of self-fashioning through Islamic discursive models without engaging with broader socio-political influences, familial relationships, or work commitments. Rather, Liberatore demonstrates how issues such as fashion, clothing, and romantic relationships are equally important in understanding women's subjectivities. In doing so, she critiques particular ways of marking revivalist or pious Muslims as exceptional at the expense of the ordinary 'everyday' aspects of Muslim life.

The empirical content presents as seven well organised and thorough chapters, describing the experiences of first- and second-generation Somali Muslim women who migrated and/or were born and raised in post-9/11 Britain. In chapters two to four, Liberatore skillfully intertwines historical, political, and cultural debates with the life-history narratives of first-generation women who experienced post-independence Somalia, the nationalist Barre regime and later the civil war, and who then settled and adjusted to life in Britain. There is an evident tension between the first-generation women's frustration to meet educational 'aspirations' for their daughters in Britain, some whom desire conspicuous consumption,

wealth, and status instead, and their aim of raising 'good (Somali Muslim) daughters' who embody cultural values and behaviours. Upon their arrival in Britain, many first-generation women lost their independence and status, as previously attained skills and qualifications were no longer valued, and as a result their practice of piety increased in importance. Their experience of 'strangeness' meant that wearing the hijab became a marker of identity, as participant Faadumo explains 'who am I if I'm not even a good Muslim' (p. 92). Focusing on religion has enabled some women to distance themselves from Somalia's social and political upheavals and provided a way to maintain their sense of identity.

In the second half of the book, chapters five to eight, Liberatore addresses the aspirations of second-generation Somali women. Focusing on their engagements with aspects of Somali culture, including their discussions of female genital mutilation and their criticisms of previous generations' cultural practices. This generation are keen to separate themselves from perceptions of Somalis as 'backward' and traditional. For these women, Somali culture is something that can be shaped, modified, modernised, challenged, and transcended. For instance, in chapter five, Layla, who appropriates multiple styles of dress to express her multiple modes of selfhood, believes in her ability to transform herself. She disputes traditional notions which judge her for not wearing the hijab as an abandonment of faith or loss of culture. For Layla, faith is an identity, a collection of values and practices which she believes she can pick and choose from freely. In doing so she is creating a new way of being in response to reifying Somali stereotypes or strict expectations of being a 'good' Muslim.

For other women, the challenge is prioritising religion over 'Somaliness', which emerged from a nationalist project to create a modern and authentic Somali culture. These women consider Somaliness and religion to be qualitatively different categories and seek reform through a reflexive and self-conscious Islamic practice, 'mosque hopping' in pursuit of knowledge and scholarship to further their personal development. Here Liberatore challenges restrictive and essentialising notions of culture and religion that have emerged from the politics of difference, arguing that associating the secularisation of Islam with increasing individualisation excludes practitioners' deliberative and disciplined

engagement with pious projects. The discourse that surrounds veiling in Britain is taken as a case in point. It is an object of scrutiny, indiscriminately associated with 'extreme' religiosity and set against the liberal notion of equality. Somali women problematise these representations by negotiating practices of self-fashioning, altering their ideas of exterior practice as well as interior dimensions of the self. Intergenerational conflicts over veiling are particularly illuminating. While parents consider the hijab pivotal to being a 'good Muslim' with moral integrity, younger generations challenge this idealisation of piety as one which reflects the popular, political, and media characteristics attributed to Muslim communities. By appropriating a critique of multiculturalism to condemn their mothers' practices of wearing the hijab, which they believe is due to social pressure and fear of judgement rather than an intimate connection with Allah, they emphasise the roles of submission to others and inequitable gender relations which further play into an anti-Islamic rhetoric. While these young Somali women criticise their mothers' veiling as forced, they describe their own wearing of the hijab as a conscious, freely-given choice, which enables them to participate in wider society, disrupt stereotypical representations, and challenge oppressive cultural and patriarchal norms while managing modesty in their own style.

Methodological considerations include a chapter about Liberatore's experience conducting fieldwork in London, the pains of traveling across the city, challenges to building relationships with interlocutors, and having to abandon her vegetarianism for a year. In her concluding chapter, Liberatore discusses the nature of the debates that surround Islam in Britain and the ethical issues incumbent on conducting academic research in this area, including its potential for replicating securitisation policies. These debates are increasingly important following the incorporation of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) initiated under Tony Blair's New Labour government in 2003 and in the creation of the Prevent policy. The policy requires local governments and frontline workers, including those who work in health and education, to report 'potential threats' of radicalisation, terrorism, and non-violent extremism. The xenophobic rhetoric perpetuated by populist and right-wing movements, including that used during the recent Brexit campaign, has sought to establish diversity as detrimental to Britain and its national sovereignty. Islam itself has been signalled as the primary threat to cohesion and common

values. However, Liberatore does not address these debates in relation to Somali Muslim women, but rather seeks to analyse Somali women's own 'distinctive fields of problematisation' (p. 8) in relation to historically shifting policies. By incorporating the narratives of Somali women alongside socio-political and cultural debates, Liberatore makes a compelling critique on how liberal democracies scrutinise, manage, and govern difference.

This monograph is an excellent resource for academics and students of anthropology, politics, and gender studies, and has important implications for both policy and public discussions. Liberatore's long-term experience as a researcher in this field, her work with community organisations and campaigns, and her extensive participation in the everyday lives of her interlocutors is evident throughout her work. What Liberatore's book aptly demonstrates is that a wider examination of 'struggle, ambivalence, incoherence, and failure must also receive attention in the study of everyday religiosity' (Osella and Soares 2010: 11). In doing so it challenges an over investment in Islamic revivalism, piety and 'ethical self-cultivation' (Fadil & Fernando, 2015: 60) through Islamic norms which can be reductionist, privileging religiosity over the political, economic, and structural influences which mediate Muslim lives. While the book contains a tension between the desire to articulate the multiple ways people live and find meaning, and the ways they resist, create, and produce agency in the 'everyday', Liberatore successfully addresses the complexity of that experience for British Somali Muslim women. This research offers an important and necessary inductive approach to the study of British Muslim women's subjectivities and the formation of identities by critically engaging with and reworking political, academic, and theoretical debates while equally prioritising women's everyday lived experiences.

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Qudra Goodall is an ESRC funded PhD candidate and Associate Tutor at The University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. She has produced a film about British [Muslim] values as part of a RCUK-funded research project which explores second-generation British convert Muslim women's perspectives on the compatibility of 'British' and 'Islamic' values. Her doctoral research is interested in collating the everyday religious and spiritual experiences and subjectivities of first- and second-generation British convert Muslim women. Particularly in relation to self and personhood, agency and embodied intersectionality.

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