

ing them into Christianized culture) invites the possibility of divergent Mennonite communities. But this, too, may be the inheritance of dissent.

While I admire such radical receptivity and as several essays attest its centrality in the Mennonite tradition, I was glad to see Peter Dula wrestle with what is not part of the tradition, namely human rights. Observing the lack of rights mentioned in Scripture, Dula sees the attempt to read rights in Scripture as others have, as an effort not to listen to the Scripture on its own terms. Instead, Dula reads the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 as an example of discerning what it means to follow Jesus' injunction to show mercy to his neighbor. For Dula, there is no universal concept of human rights but only the struggle of believers to identify what actions might be appropriate to a particular time and place. The essay sounds a discordant note when read next to other contributions in the volume.

My sense is that readers, like the contributors, have the most to gain from dwelling with points of tension provided they are explored with the generosity and respect that the editors write characterized the meetings in Winnipeg. With the grace of God, another installment in this series is on the horizon. My hope is that the next volume might offer readers a closer view of the disagreements that bind these scholars in dialogue so that we, too, may learn from them.

ALI ASLAM, *Princeton University*.

Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010. 294 pp. \$24.95. ISBN: 9780199329281.

Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem invites the reader into the stories of West African immigrants as they find their way in a new home. The stories frequently describe encounters with the variety of challenges faced by newcomers. The author has structured the book so that each chapter addresses one of those challenges. "Unlike similar works, this book does not simply cover these immigrants in isolation. It takes on the way they publicly engage others; shift their religious, racial and ethnic identities; alter the urban terrain; and give new meaning to our world" (13).

Abdullah does an excellent job of exposing the range of issues and difficulties facing newcomers to the United States. Nothing, it seems, is simple or to be taken for granted. There are the obvious difficulties of language and culture, and the unavoidable hard work of getting acclimated enough to function well in one's new location.

As Abdullah discovers, Islam is critical to the survival of his interviewees. But it is also the source of strain on some newly forming relationships. For example, in their home countries, many of those interviewed lived among those whose faith

they shared. The daily rhythms of work were shaped in large measure by the claims of religion. In Harlem, however, many employers are not Muslim and have little awareness of Islam. So, Abdullah invites his interviewees to talk about their experience of negotiating with employers about something as fundamental to Islam as the five daily prayer times. Many have to explain this practice to their employers, and, in some cases, choose between staying faithful to their religious practices or keeping their jobs.

Then there are the inevitable tensions that arise when newcomers enter an already inhabited space. Abdullah devotes a chapter to the complexity of the relationship between African immigrants and Black Americans for whom Harlem has long been home. Some Black Americans believe the immigrants to be haughty and condescending. Some African immigrants have absorbed the racial stereotypes fostered by American films. For many, distrust is the starting point for any interaction. Even the clothing worn by African immigrants, clothing that reminds them of home, can be a barrier to communication with their Black neighbors.

And there is the search for meaningful employment that also pays the bills and leaves enough left over to send home. For many, coming to America meant leaving family, friends, and property behind. But it was for the sake of those left behind that the journey was made. Some of those interviewed had well-paying, professional positions in their home country, but, because of an economic downturn or family tragedy, were suddenly unable to provide for all those for whom they were responsible. And so they left home, hoping that they would earn enough in the United States not only to meet their own needs, but also to provide financial support to those they left behind. Whatever success or wealth is accumulated in the United States is meant to be shared, not kept for one's own.

This sense of familial obligation and responsibility is carried over into the new setting. Abdullah describes the ways in which Senegalese immigrants gather around new arrivals and do what they can to make sure that each person has what is needed to settle into their new home. A room is offered. A loan is given. Local vendors will rally together to provide the newcomer with funds and merchandise enough to start their own street-side business, and with no expectation of repayment. It seems Mennonites are not the only people who consider mutual aid to be part of their social and religious vocation.

In fact, one of the most surprising aspects of reading *Black Mecca* was the number of times I found myself thinking, "We Mennonites are like that." For example, much of Abdullah's research was done in and around the mosque, because it serves in many ways as the center of the community. The mosque is where folks gather to worship and to learn. It is where festivals and other communal events take place. It is a place for networking and community problem-solving. And it is what happens in the mosque that reminds the people who they really are. Isn't that how we

Mennonites see the meetinghouse?

Other similarities revolve around questions of identity. What do the clothes we wear say about us? What is the relationship of the individual to the community, and which takes priority? How does one go about finding one's place in a new setting, while remaining true to what one has inherited as tradition? How does one go about being a good American and a good Muslim? A good American and a good Mennonite?

While there are many good reasons for reading *Black Mecca*, what benefited me the most is the sense of recognition I experienced throughout the book. This is not to diminish the uniqueness of those stories and their tellers, or to downplay the many ways in which my life and the lives of those whose stories fill the book are different.

It's simply to say that at a time when Mennonites are seeking to reimagine mission in ways that don't condemn us to repeat past mistakes, there is something to be said for discovering that the distance between us and them, whoever they may be, is not so great as we thought. It turns out that our commitment to community, and our respect for the tradition, and the centrality of communal worship, are not just Mennonite values. They are also the values of the West African Muslim immigrants whose stories are told in *Black Mecca*. To my mind, that's well worth knowing.

RON ADAMS is pastor of *Madison Mennonite Church, Madison, Wisconsin*.

Jonathan Boyarin, *Mornings at the Stanton Street Shul: A Summer on the Lower East Side*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2011. 226 pp. \$18.00. ISBN: 9780823254040.

While visiting New York City earlier this year, I took a guided tour of the Eldridge Street Synagogue on the Lower East Side. Built in 1887, the synagogue was for five decades a vibrant hub of religious life and social services for thousands of Eastern European Jews who had recently immigrated to the United States.

Now those days are a distant memory. The congregation dwindled in the 1930s as Jews began to leave the neighborhood's crowded tenements for other boroughs. By the 1950s the sanctuary had become decrepit from disuse (it would later be restored to its original grandeur). Over the years, other immigrants came to replace the Jews who left. The neighborhood eventually became absorbed by what is known today as Chinatown. A small congregation continues to worship at Eldridge Street, but these days the synagogue is better known as a museum, where tourists like me flock to admire its Moorish-style architecture. As a casual visitor, it's tempting to think that the synagogue is a remnant of a vanished world.