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Book Review

Beyond Debt: Islamic Experiments in Global Finance (Daromir Rudnyckyj).
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It is remarkable how few scholars of Southeast Asia have thought to look to Islamic finance, and how few scholars of Islamic finance have paid attention to Southeast Asia, for clues as to how global Islamic networks and global finanscapes converge. In part, this two-way oversight reflects the lack of interest in finance capitalism in conventional Southeast Asian studies and the marginal position Southeast Asia continues to occupy in Islamic studies. On this point alone, anthropologist Daromir Rudnyckyj's Beyond Debt: Islamic Experiments in Global Finance, arguably the first ethnography documenting the ongoing experiment of Islamic finance in Malaysia, is a significant contribution.

Rudnyckyj's long-term research interest lies at the intersection of religion and capitalism, with a geographical focus on archipelagic Southeast Asia. There are pages in Beyond Debt where readers can find familiar traces that resonate with his first monograph, Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development, a now must-read for anyone interested in Islamic ethics, business management, and the developmental state of Indonesia. While Beyond Debt also centers on the interplay between religion, capitalism, and the state, the boundaries between the three are more ambiguous and contingent. Rudnyckyj asks: What and Who makes Islamic finance Islamic? How does it work? More importantly, is Islamic finance an alternative to conventional finance?

In answering these puzzles, Rudnyckyj treats us to a vibrant world of Islamic finance in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, a city that seeks to remake itself into the "New

York of the Muslim World" (2). This state-backed aspiration sprouted after the 2008 crisis, when the failure of North-Atlantic finance was perceived to prove the necessity and truthfulness of Islamic finance. Based on eight field trips in Malaysia between 2010 and 2015, Rudnyckyj provides cartography of expert communities in Islamic finance. The four main groups of his interlocutors are front-line practitioners in Islamic financial firms, Islamic economists at universities, regulators in supervisory institutions, and shariah scholars trained in classical Islamic knowledge.

In between the introduction and a concluding methodological note, Rudnyckyj divides the book into three parts, each containing three chapters. The three chapters in Part 1 illustrate the infrastructure of Islamic finance in Malaysia, offer the readers an overview of the four expert groups, and identify the central problem of risk and debt. Part 2 begins with sukuk, often translated into Islamic bond, and moves on to describe the iteration of Islamic finance in everyday life, including debates about different understandings of Islamic knowledge. Part 3 maintains this focus and delves deeper into the problematization of religious authenticity, bringing the discussion back to the politics of race, religion, and development in Malaysia.

Rudnyckyj makes a theoretical point well worth taking seriously by scholars of religion interested in capitalism. Departing from the common genealogy of Marcel Mauss, Karl Polanyi, and James Scott in economic anthropology (e.g., David Graeber's work on debt), in which the social relations and economy are often antithetical, Rudnyckyj builds on a different scholarly lineage of Max Weber, Michael Foucault, and Paul Rabinow to show "how new forms of subjectivity and collectivity are produced through economic action" (10). The dynamics among the four expert groups, rooted in their respective notions of Islam and Islamic finance, are carefully mapped out on a Weberian canvas. Instead of answering "What is Islamic finance" directly, the anthropologist documents how experts in the industry reflexively address this problem with a new set of market devices.

These devices are designed to tackle the problem of *ribāʾ*, the practice of usury or interest condemned in the Qur'an and many hadith. The prohibition of *ribāʾ* and the inexhaustible debate around it make Islamic finance distinct from conventional finance. Experts strive to develop various creative contracts to avoid *ribāʾ*, including *bay ʿ al- ʿīnah* and *muḍārabah*, two main models of Islamic transaction. *Bay ʿ al- ʿīnah* is a contract in which a party sells an asset to another party with deferred payment and then buys it back immediately with a lower price, which, in effect, works as an interest-bearing loan. *muḍārabah*, on the other hand, is a contract in which the two parties form a profit-and-loss-sharing partnership.

The tension between *bayʿ al-ʿīnah* and *muḍārabah* is a recurring theme in these chapters. *bayʿ al-ʿīnah* used to be the most common Islamic contract in Malaysia. However, according to many experts, *bayʿ al-ʿīnah* is shariah-compliant but not shariah-based. It is still a debt-based contract with a questionable *ribāʾ* intention, unlike *muḍārabah*, an equity-based contract that fulfills the true spirit of shariah. According to the author, this tension first indicates the difference in Islamic legal schools (madhhab) between Southeast Asia and the Middle East. *Bayʿ al-ʿīnah* is permissible in countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, where the Shafi'i school prevails, but it is unacceptable in most Gulf states. To make itself a new hub of global Islamic finance, Malaysian professionals must embrace the equity-based *muḍārabah*. Rudnyckyj pushes this tension further to point out that "the opposition between shariah-based and shariah-compliant Islamic finance was not merely a technical problem but an epistemological one" (148). The underlying problem is the debatable relationship between Islam and secular knowledge (whether Islam is parallel to or prior to secular knowledge) and the contrasting notions of form and content within Islamic tradition (whether human intention is knowable and assessable to others except Allah). This insight is arguably one of the book's most significant contributions to Islamic studies.

The less felicitous aspect of this work, if any, lies in the passages where Rudnyckyj slips into presentism. *Bayʿ al-ʿīnah* and *muḍārabah* are sometimes portrayed as entirely recent (re)inventions of Islamic finance from professionals who seek to "adapt financial contracts that were characteristic of the Arabian Peninsula during the seventh century CE to contemporary contexts" (46). We should bear in mind that between the seventh century and now, generations of Muslim scholars were striving to overcome the *ribāʾ* problem. The Islamic network in Southeast Asia emerged from a trans-Indian Ocean trading network. How did Muslim traders avoid *ribāʾ* in early modern Southeast Asia? Do these concepts continue to shape how Islamic transactions are done in Malaysia today? These questions are probably well beyond the scope that a single book can address, but the readers might get a clearer picture of the change and continuity of Islamic finance if Rudnyckyj pays more attention to other forms of globalization that predate modern capitalism.

It is worth noting that Beyond Debt includes boxes, well-illustrated graphs, and a glossary of Islamic financial terms to guide the readers through this unfamiliar terrain patiently. This engagingly written book should be welcome reading for all students and researchers of Islam, financial neoliberalism, globalization, Southeast Asia, as well as general readers who want to learn more about Islamic finance.