the modern state...’ (p. 29). The state’s right to decide questions at the heart of secularism’s problem-space is an expression of its sovereign power, which in turn is vested in the state’s legal authority and juridical structures. In fact, the legal concept of public order props up secularism’s active principle – i.e. the state’s authority to decide what is religion/religious and to determine the impact of religion on social life.

Despite the pervasiveness of secular power and state sovereignty, Agrama argues that there exist practices, spaces and movements that evade this power and are indifferent to it. His discussion of these apertures – which he terms asecular – is arguably the most compelling aspect of his project. Sovereignty becomes central to Agrama’s analysis as he contends that state sovereignty sustains secularism while bare sovereignty (that is the pure popular sovereignty evident in Egypt’s recent mass protests) is utterly unconcerned with the questions central to secularism. These protests are defined by asecular power – a power outside of the problem-space of secularism. Asecularity takes a multiplicity of forms ranging from the practice and space of protest movements to that of the Fatwa Council. Despite being easily identifiable as religious, the Council, like the protest movements, is indifferent to the stakes and questions of secularism and avoids the ‘conceptual-affective structures through which secular power’ works (231).

Highlighting the significance of asecularity, Agrama asserts that the bare sovereignty of the protest movements demonstrates that an ethos of democratic sensibilities can be expressed without care for secularism and without identifying politics as intractably linked to the terms of the sovereign state. This intriguing possibility of resistance to state sovereignty and secular power is only explored briefly in Agrama’s work. This is unfortunate given the significance of such resistance, since, as Agrama reminds us, the state’s invasiveness in our social lives and its control over politics and religion are arguably on the rise due to the global dominance of the national-security paradigm.

Although Agrama’s brief discussion of asecularity might leave the reader wanting, this possible weakness pales in comparison to his path-breaking book’s contributions. Through shifting the established paradigm of scholarly discourse from what secularism is to what secularism does, Agrama poses a formidable challenge to recent theorizations on the subject. His book’s brilliant and incisive arguments must be grappled with seriously by all those engaged in studies of religion and secularity.

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Mediated representations of marginalized minority groups are perhaps one of the most widely explored topics in social-science research. Studies show that
these groups are underrepresented (invisible) or misrepresented (negative image) in major media discourses. Other studies have showed marginalized groups pictured as threatening pre-existing social norms in a way that exacerbates a moral panic (Cohen 2002); or as ‘deviant others’ responsible for the economic and social ills of the society (Hall 1997). And just as it might seem there is nothing more to add to this body of knowledge, Evelyn Alsultany, an associate professor at the University of Michigan, unravels previously un-explored discursive complexities surrounding these representations in her book on mediated representations of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11 in the USA.

In her book, Alsultany goes beyond explanations of media discourses as simply forming the dichotomies of the positive and the negative, the good and the bad, visible and invisible. Applying a critical cultural studies approach, the author analyses the ideological work of the Arab Muslim image formation beyond positive-negative dichotomization, in relation to its narrative context (p. 14). This leads Alsultany to argue that the positive image does not eliminate stereotyping. On the contrary, while introducing the discursive principle of ‘simplified complex representations’ the author convincingly shows how the media’s approach to implementing more complex and sympathetic representations of Arab Muslim still reproduces strong, but now more subtle, neo-racist statements (13). Examples of simplified complex representations include the depictions of Arab Muslims as exclusively patriotic Americans assisting the US government and fighting together against terrorism, or attempts to ‘challenge’ diverse Muslim identities by simply stating ‘that not all Muslims advocate terrorism’ (23).

The aim of balancing straightforward racism and Islamophobia with simplified complex representations speaks to different exclusionary logics of neo-racism discourse. One example of exclusionary logic appearing throughout Alsutany’s analysis is the logic of exception. In US TV dramas, 9/11 is framed as an exceptional moment of crisis demanding exceptional measures in order to protect the freedom of the nation: ‘if not safe one can never be free’ (56). As Alsutany shows, this logic of ‘racism is wrong but necessarily’ (50) is prevalent in post 9/11 media coverage of Arabs and Muslims. Paradoxically, deemed as unfair and illegal, this logic is still used to normalize and justify racism under the name of ultimate freedom and peace.

Another exclusionary logic prevalent in Alsutany’s analysis is the logic of diversity patriotism. This logic relies on the notion that ‘Muslims are good’ as long as it serves the US national image as a tolerant and diversity sensitive country. In other words, the positive and sensitive image of Arab Muslims is used in order to create an image that the US is not a threat to the Muslims worldwide (160). As Alsultany argues: ‘The shiny veneer of diversity can be a deceptive palliative, an optimistic balm to soothe the harsh reality of racist policies and practices.’ (159–60). These alleged inclusive images contribute to a positive image of the USA rather than actually including difference for the sake of the excluded. According to Alsultany, this creates a sense of
benevolence – ‘a sense that viewers, and Americans more broadly, are well meaning in even the most difficult circumstances’ (49). This explanation goes along the lines of Balibar’s notion of the ‘other’s other’ (2005). He indicated that a certain ‘we-group’ emerges by promoting itself through its opposite, which it denigrates. In other words, the ‘we-group’ creates its identity by establishing ‘itself as the other’s other’ (Balibar 2005). Yet, as Alsutany shows, this opposition does not necessarily rely on the simple notion that “We don’t know who we are if we don’t know our enemies;’ (Schmitt 1996), but can also include positive self-promotion through over-simplified attempts to positively acknowledge the difference of the ‘other’.

One of the most interesting contributions that Alsultany brings into the analysis of exclusionary logics is the relation of anti-Muslim sentiment to other identity categories such as gender, class, religion and sexuality. Alsultany describes the story of John Walker Lindh – a white American who converted to the Islam and was trained as a soldier for Al Qaeda (109). The author shows how a particular framing of John’s biography serves as an explanation for terrorism (110). In media discourse, ‘going Muslim’ was pictured as a step from civilization to barbaric behavior. The reasons for his ‘deviance’ was explained as related to John’s liberal upbringing (gay dad and hippy mom, brought up in a liberal town, attended alternative school), his presumed youth asexuality and developed homosexuality (not interested in girls as every normal American should be) (112). While analyzing this particular story, Alsultany shows how homosexuality and his liberal upbringing are used as reasons for ‘why John did go Muslim.’ In media discourse John’s biography manifest abnormality on all levels, not only his religious choice, but also his liberal upbringing and sexuality are reasoned to be two sides of the same coin.

Alsutany’s work and especially her analysis of the John Walker Lindh story expand ways of thinking about cultural logics of exclusion and raise important and interesting analytical questions. If we consider anti-Muslim and anti-homosexual sentiments to be two different yet not separate frameworks of thought, then one may ask how Islamophobia is related to homophobia. What do these two exclusionary sentiments have in common and in what particular situations are they used to support each other? Applying a nexus perspective of looking at how different exclusionary logics relate and support each other, we can perhaps more accurately detect different ways ‘difference’ is naturalized in people’s reasoning.

Undoubtedly, Alsultany’s book is a comprehensive and empirically convincing exploration of media representations and cultural logics of exclusion. Thus, it will find its use and interest among social science or humanities researchers and students, as well as anybody sensitive to the issues of human rights and social equality.
The immense complexities inherent in Arab diaspora seem only further complicated for those émigrés in the Americas, as revealed in *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*. Editors Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shobat marshal together a leading cast of scholars to resurrect the experiences of those Arab immigrants, rich in cultural, political and religious identities, who settled a region equal in cultural diversity and political variety. The result is perhaps one of the most dynamic diasporic stories of our time. The contributions therein are as distinct and diversified as the topic itself. Collectively, however, this edited anthology offers one of the most comprehensive examinations brought forth on Arab identity, immigration and cultural politics in the Americas.

Identity is multifaceted in its own right, never mind the complex nature of Arab diaspora. Therefore, the editors deserve enormous credit for tackling such a complicated topic. The difficulty in recounting the Arab diaspora comes with explaining how Arabs’ complicated sense of self has functioned in lands where cultural identities and social legacies themselves remain largely unresolved. In fact, it is this reality that makes Arab immigration and assimilation in the Western Hemisphere so intriguing.

The editors waste no time identifying their purpose(s) in this complex, multilayered discussion. Perhaps the most crucial objective is distinguishing perspectives. The editors note that the United States and Europe share a common framework in analysis on Arab immigration. This framework is most often used in scholarship addressing Arab identities outside the Middle East. Yet the interaction ‘between diasporic communities’, they claim, are distinct ‘in each site in the Americas’ (p. 5). In short, the American experience is so diverse that the European model is not a suitable option. Therefore, the book goes against the grain by providing a lens ‘into the parallel and separate immigrations to the Americas’ and their respective interconnectedness (8). Additionally, the editors write that the book ‘strives to