Religious Experience: North and South, edited by René Gothóni. Peter Lang, 2012. ix+282pp., SFR 68.00/€ 56.20, ISBN-13: 9783034308533.

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This anthology, a collection of essays considering the contemporary religious worlds of Finland and Malta—sometimes alone and sometimes comparatively—at first seems an odd collection. Few scholars have produced many comparative studies of Finland and Malta, and presumably relatively few will continue in this vein. Yet the collection, born from a conference at the University of Helsinki in 2010, offers a good picture of religion in these two national contexts. None of the authors consider new religious movements explicitly, though a focus on new religiosity and various shifts within religion and society makes this book of relevance to *IJSNR* readers interested in religion in contemporary Europe.

René Gothóni has both edited the anthology and provided an introduction focusing on the idea of *experience* as a category, and religious experience as a subtype of that. Gothóni takes a linguistic approach to the topic, delving into German source material and ending in game theory. The theoretical model he offers is interesting, but the contributors generally do not make use of it. Since Gothóni himself only loosely considers the Finnish religious context—and not at all the Maltese—the reader is left somewhat disoriented by this initial chapter.

The contributors in fact seldom explicitly compare the Maltese and Finnish contexts. Only Emmanuel Agius makes this central in his consideration of the connection between bioethics, religious experience, and national/cultural/social identity. Agius highlights differences of secularization in Catholic Malta as compared to Lutheran Finland and the corresponding effects on acceptance of abortion and euthanasia in these historically Christian countries.

The authors of the other chapters look at either Finland or Malta for their work and tend not to draw explicit comparisons. Five of this anthology's chapters focus on Malta, with three highlighting transformations in the *fešta* tradition. Emanuel P. Magro demonstrates how the *fešta* functions as a sacred space for religious experience. He provides historical background on the development of the *fešta* tradition, details of how the typical *fešta* occurs, and an

analysis of how individuals experience the *festa* as a form of popular religious experience. Hector Scerri considers Maltese table fellowship and the implicit and explicit spirituality present therein. The family *festa* meal, he argues, serves as a means of solidifying social cohesion, which he contrasts with the waning power of the public feasts associated with saint day festivals. Adrian Gellel and Mark Sultana similarly look to the Maltese *festa* tradition, but employ a hermeneutic of gender to examine the models of feminine spirituality present therein, and consider the place of women—and lack therefore—in the *festa* practices. The only Maltese chapter that is not particularly satisfying is Paul Galea's comparison of the attitudes and personality types of Maltese seminarians as compared to psychology students at the University of Malta. Galea finds several notable differences, but his discussion does not provide adequate explanation or exploration, nor is it particularly surprising that seminarian students tend to fall within a particular nexus of personality types.

Though none of this is new in the way that scholars of NRMs generally employ the term, it is of relevance to our study of religious innovation and change. On such matters, contributor George Grima offers the most explicit consideration in the Maltese context, writing on changing religious norms in Malta. He considers the history of religion in Malta and the way in which Catholicism became linked to Maltese national identity. He looks to recent rises in religious individualism, but also patterns of strong Catholic identity retained among the youth of Malta.

Of the four chapters focusing on Finland, each highlights issues of religious and national identity. Tuula Sakaranaho provides an excellent summary of the religious history and contemporary condition in Finland, with special attention to the development of ideas of religious freedom and the relation of individual freedom to community and the two state churches. "Membership in the Lutheran Church serves the Finns as one of the important banners of identity," Sakaranaho argues. (94) Risto Pulkkinen looks to Finnishness itself as a religion, considering the way in which nationalism, romanticism, and folkways functioned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Extending this approach, Riku Hämäläinen writes of the Finnish sauna as a sort of sacred site and the act of taking sauna as a religious practice. After providing historical and social background on the development and use of the sauna, he looks to how the sauna has historically functioned in ritual settings as a rite of passage, healing, or calendric rite. Like the chapters on Malta, these studies of religion in Finland offer implicit value to the study of new religiosity, if not NRMs themselves.

Terhi Utriainen and Heikki Pesonen's chapter on how Finnish women have

created religious practices centering on nature and eco-spirituality offers the most relevance to researchers and students of new religious movements. They look to two sets of case studies, first a cluster of three eco-feminist theologians who forefront pre-Christian Finnish religiosity and fashion ecologically-oriented spiritualities, and second a group of New Age adherents. They argue that all such women engage in theological work to sacralize nature, resuscitate some elements of pre-Christian Finnish heritage, and fashion egalitarian religious worldview.

For a book not explicitly treating themes of NRMs, there is value for readers of *IJSNR* in *Religious Experience: North and South*, particularly for those interested in contextualizing the social and religious changes that we study. As someone with a limited degree of direct experience studying Finnish NRMs, I found in several chapters helpful materials in framing how religion has developed and morphed in modern Finland. I suspect that researchers active in the Maltese context will similarly find value in this anthology.