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Contestations, Voices, edited by Heather Shipley

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## **Review of Heather Shipley (ed.), *Globalized Religion and Sexual Identity: Contexts, Contestations, Voices*, Leiden: Brill 2014, xiv + 324 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-26956-9**

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*Globalized Religion and Sexual Identity: Contexts, Contestations, Voices* is a welcome addition to literature on the intersections of religion, gender and sexuality. Theoretically and methodologically diverse, offering case studies focused on Britain, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany and the United States, the chapters generally complement each other. The collection is organized into three sections; 'Contexts', focusing on theoretical approaches to the relationships between religion and sexual identity; 'Contestations' focusing on specific sites of conflict, with a methodological preference for the analysis of policy discourse; and 'Voices' which nominally prioritises the perspectives of research participants or otherwise offers richer illustrations of everyday negotiations of religion and sexuality. There is, of course, a certain amount of arbitrariness about which chapters belong where, but it does allow the reader to follow the book's most prominent topic, conservative Evangelical opposition to homosexuality, across several countries and through several comparative and complimentary methodological and theoretical perspectives, while being exposed to other articulations of the religion and sexuality dynamic along the way.

Given the amount of material in the book on Evangelical opposition to homosexuality, it is somewhat ironic that a key issue which the editor wishes to draw out is that while sexuality and religion are often axiomatically viewed as public antagonists, caught up in a zero sum game pitting religiosity against sexual autonomy, this need not be the case. Many of the chapters are rather straightforwardly concerned with this antagonism, specifically in the context of Evangelicalism which nine of the fourteen chapters are substantially concerned with. Other chapters take a less direct approach, however. Riva Lieflander's chapter on divisions in the global Anglican church over sexuality takes the view that disagreements over sexuality are merely a 'symptom' of broader conflicts over authority and identity within the diverse (post)colonial institution (ch. 7). Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini's chapter on conflict over sexuality and religion before and during the Obama presidency suggests that greater religious freedom and sexual autonomy might co-exist if overlapping fields such as church

marriages are legislated away (ch. 5). Not dissimilarly, Shun-Hing Chan and Ping Huang's chapter on homosexuality and Christianity in mainland China notes the limits on freedom that homosexuals, Christians – and especially homosexual Christians – suffer in the country (ch. 8).

The four essays in the first section, 'Contexts', offer an excellent illustration of the variety of theoretical and methodological approaches available to scholars of religion, sexuality and gender, as well as offering examples of how these theoretical and methodological approaches can be brought together in sometimes unconventional ways. The first chapter, Rebecca Barrett-Fox's analysis of 'The Rise of Anti-Gay Religious Right Activism in the U.S.' works very well as an opening to the collection in thinking through half a dozen different social scientific approaches to the issue in question. Readers will find some approaches more (or less) convincing, of course, and the evidence offered of each is necessarily limited, but the chapter nevertheless offers an excellent example of targeting complimentary and competing theories on an obviously pressing and contemporary topic in the field.

The second chapter, Chiu Man-chung's 'Desiring Justice, Acting *Inana*', is even more theoretically wide-ranging. From within the framework of legal studies, Chiu places Slavoj Žižek's eclectic psychoanalytic radicalism in conversation with Mahayana Buddhism, to analyse whether the values of Rawlsian social liberalism are politically desirable and culturally compatible with Chinese attitudes towards gender, sexuality and marriage. Noting the complexity of transplanting North American liberal values through Hong Kong's colonial common law legal system into Chinese culture, Chiu's chapter is one of the few that actually touches upon that first word in the collection's title, '*Globalized*'. Revealingly, neither this term, nor any of its conjugations, appear in the index. The term 'transnational' is indexed in relation to responses to a German legal ruling that would prohibit the circumcision of young children (ch. 4) and conflicts over sexuality in the global Anglican communion (ch. 7), which is a question of globalized religion and sexual identity if there ever was one. Of course the religions analysed here, primarily Protestant Christianity, are examples of globalization *avant la lettre*, but there is a difference between having a global focus because chapters focus on Brazil, Canada, Germany, and so on, and a focus on globalization as a process and an object of well-developed academic inquiry. The editor notes that controversies around and between religion and sexuality exist 'on a global scale' (p. 317) but few contributors address the question of how the 'global' functions as a field in the construction and performance of religious and sexual identities. Shun-Hing Chan and Ping Huang's chapter on sexuality and Protestantism in the public sphere in China is one chapter that does address globalization, noting the impact of the North American-influenced global Evangelical mediascape on the attitudes of Protestants in China (ch. 8).

Although the forms of religion and sexual identity in question are not particularly diverse, with a preponderance of articles focused on Protestantism and homosexuality, the analysis of the forums in which sexuality and religion are debated is. Barrett-Fox (ch. 1) and Chiu's (ch. 2) chapters are largely concerned with elite discourse and opinion – legal judgments, policy documents, and professional political campaign statements. So too is Amélie Barras and Dia Dabby's chapter on circumcision and secularism in contemporary Germany (ch. 4), and Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini's chapter, contextualizing contemporary

conflict over religious and sexual identity and liberties in the context of US American Presidential politics in the (ubiquitous) context of 'neo-liberalism' (ch. 5). In contrast Kate Power's chapter engages in discourse analysis based on interviews and focus group discussions with rural Canadian Christians (ch. 3). Similarly, Nina Rosas and Cristina Maria de Castro's chapter on 'Charismatic Protestantism, Gender and Sexuality in Brazil' (ch. 10) is based on ethnographic research and provides an exemplary, rich description of the everyday negotiations of gender and sexuality for members of the country's growing, conservative religious movement which has proved fascinating to scholars of religion and gender for some decades now. The different foci and sources of data is so noticeable throughout the collection, with the juxtaposition of policy documents of secular and religious institutions and the everyday discourses and practices of individuals and religious communities, that there ought to be significant methodological points to be drawn out, which the book's very brief conclusion (pp. 313–318) could have addressed.

This difference in subject matter and data is particularly evident in the second and third sections, 'Contestations' and 'Voices'; the former is largely concerned with the analysis of political or institutional policy, and the latter with the interplay of religion and sexuality in everyday lives. The juxtaposition of subject matter and methodology is most productive in comparing Stephen Hunt's chapter on public discourses and policies of various churches in the United Kingdom (ch. 9), with Anna Strhan's complimentary chapter drawn from an ethnographic study of Evangelicals in London which notes their reluctance to discuss their conservative beliefs on sexuality in everyday life with anyone but their co-religionists (ch. 11). The normative religious institutional frameworks and formal debates over sexuality are analysed, but it is also shown that the issues manifest in the lives of congregants in rather different ways than policy would suggest. Which is to argue, as Heather Shipley and Pamela Dickey Young do in their chapter 'Values and Practices' (ch. 13), that in secularizing liberal societies like the United Kingdom and Canada, religion and sexuality are increasingly embodied and enacted 'outside the boundaries of text and dogma' (p. 278).

My concern about the lack of attention to globalization notwithstanding, *Globalized Religion and Sexual Identity* is a resource that I am sure scholars of religion, gender and sexuality will find a useful addition to their libraries. Students in particular will find it a valuable resource, introducing, outlining and above all applying various theoretical and methodological approaches to key topics within the field. Unfortunately I must end on a negative note, for there are various minor typographical errors and inconsistencies in referencing throughout the collection. While they are only a passing distraction, one would have expected that a book manufactured and priced for posterity would have been subject to more thorough proofreading.