

Editor:	Kristin Aune, Sonya Sharma and Giselle Vincett
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Review:

The book aims to assess how women's ways of understanding and experiencing religiosity fit within the broader context of religion in 'the West,' and, in particular, how the analyses of female religiosities inform our understanding on secularisation. By exploring diverse ways in which women approach religion in 'the West,' the volume scrutinises female religiosities in an interdisciplinary gaze. The book has been divided into three main sections. The first, deals with Christianity, the second with 'Alternative Spiritualities,' and the third, with Islam.

The section on Christianity begins with Penny Long Marler's contribution in which she explores how the ideal of nuclear family in the UK and the US has transformed and how this change has affected female involvement in religion. The author contends that piety has suffered a process of defeminisation; whilst historically speaking women accounted and still account for the majority of churchgoers, they are currently part of a trend of defection from traditional denominations. Besides, women's religiosities also concur with a broader trend towards 'believing without belonging' characteristic of religion in past-industrial milieus.

The second contribution in this section is Kristin Aune's article, which provides a fascinating case-study of a UK evangelical congregation. The author is particularly interested in analysing the higher than average percentage of singleness among the women of this congregation and their underrepresentation in leadership roles. Based on extensive fieldwork, she discusses women's marginalisation from ministry opportunities as exemplified in the case of a female member's struggle to lead a congregational group. Aune concludes that rather than exceptional, the approach to female singleness as non-normative is not exclusively evangelical, but one shared by the wider society. She further argues that conceiving female singleness as something marginal is closely

linked to the difficulties single women face to acquire ministerial positions, which may contribute to understand female increasing religious disaffiliation within the evangelical congregation analysed.

Sonya Sharma's article is the third in the section. It researches how young female members of Protestant churches negotiate their sexual experiences in relation to the message of shame and guilt that their churches hold on unmarried sexual relationships. She argues that some of the interviewed girls' experiences were characterised by a sense of detachment and alienation that makes their conflicting Christian and sexual identities compatible. For some others their sexual experiences made it impossible to keep complying with the ideal of the 'good Christian girl' and have left the church though have moved towards other forms of spiritual praxis.

The last article of the Christianity's section is that of Marta Trzebiatowska, in which she sketches the social profile of the young Polish woman who decides to become a nun. After a general outline of the transformations undertaken by Catholic religious communities in Poland, the author discusses the data gathered by interviewing thirty five nuns. She concludes that 'a calling' results from a combination of 'habitus' (i.e. being previously exposed to the symbolic capital of Catholicism) and a series of accidental events that the person imbues with meaning and relates with the calling.

The second section of the book deals with 'Alternative Spiritualities.' Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers offer the first contribution, in which they explore how 'spiritual' (i.e. 'New-Age') beliefs have moved beyond its original spiritual context to pervade other aspects of life (e.g. business, media) thanks to a gendered process of de-traditionalisation. Following a detailed quantitative survey the authors conclude that, similarly to what happens with traditional forms of religion, post-traditional spiritualities are more typically followed by women than by men.

In the second article of this section, Sian Reid discusses female involvement in paganism and Goddess religion in Canada. Based on quantitative as well as qualitative research, she contends that female participation in Paganism and Goddess religion triplicates that of men. The author proposes as a plausible explanation, that they are religiosities uncoerced from patriarchal religious institutions, what make them able to channel the spiritual demands of female devotees in a more inspiring and empowering way.

Giselle Vincett's contribution is the third of its section and it explores the identities of the 'fusers,' British feminists who declare themselves to simultaneously be Christian and Pagan. The author describes a general profile that is indicative of the kind of people susceptible to be a fuser: middle aged woman from a Christian background who became 'fuser' after a period of religious disengagement. Most of them have had mystical experiences, commonly visions. Vincett shows 'fusers' attempts to hold together Neo-paganism and Christianity, not only at the level of beliefs, but also by creating hybrid ritual practices.

Linda Woodhead's article explores in the last article of the section the implications that late modern forms of femininity among white middle-class women in the UK and US have on religion. Despite of sharing a feeling of self-worth and entitlement, they often find themselves in a contradiction between two common modes of selfhood –the successful career woman and the 'wife-and-mother' one. The author suggests that whereas the former is often perceived as a form of 'ambiguous femininity,' commonly associated with selfishness, the latter complies with the ethos of the Christian church. Therefore, she argues, one of the reasons for growth of Christianity during the post-war period and until the 1950s was its support of 'caring' femininities of domesticity, whereas church decline during the later baby-boomers generation needs also to be seen as an incompatibility between the Church's male-referential approach to femininity and the emerging projects of the self of middle-class women. The author further suggests that despite of the fact that Churches have tried to incorporate an egalitarian discourse, their rituals, ethos and language keep reinforcing male-referential femininities. Thence, the success of alternative forms of spirituality among British and American white middle-class women can be understood in terms of their more flexible and dialectic nature between self and other, accepting a variety of 'projects of the self' and proposing a seemingly conciliation between two apparently contradicting projects of femininity.

The third section in the volume deals with Islam and is inaugurated by Serena Hussain's research on Muslim women in Britain. A detailed quantitative analysis led her to conclude that Muslim women tend to be more religious than other women in the country. According to the author, the average British Muslim woman is less likely to engage in paid work outside the home, tend to marry and do it when they are quite young, can live within a nuclear or extended family unit (the latter more common among South-Asian Muslims), and is most likely to have three or more children than the rest of women.

Sarah Bracke's contribution deals with female narratives of religious revival in post-communist Kazan (Tatarstan). She contends that women in Kazan have framed their religiosities in relation to the existing imaginary that surrounds 'the babushka,' which connects rurality and tradition to Islam. By contrast, the Islamic revival of the city, gives women an active role in religion centred in the pursuit of religious knowledge. These new emerging Islamic subjectivities are defined by referring to a story of quotidian 'survival,' led by nameless women, in which Islam has overcome its expected fate during Soviet times.

The third contribution of the section is the study undertaken by Rubina Ramji on second generation Canadian Muslim women and their involvement and attitudes towards religion. As other contributions in the volume have done with other contexts, the author sketches a profile of the young Canadian Muslim woman and concludes that she is likely to: a) be religiously observant; b) attach to the hijab a decisive role in her identity as a marker of intensity of religious practice and belief; c) declare to have been influenced by the religiosities of their parents; and, d) consider religion to have a protective effect and to shape her career choices.

Garbi Schmidt's article on Muslim immigrant women in the United States is the last contribution of the book. Her research is based on fieldwork conducted before 9/11 and it particularly deals with how religion informed women's struggles for empowerment within the Muslim community and at a broader societal level. Similar to Bracke's conclusion, the author shows how new forms of religious reform are eminently intellectual; in some cases characterised by social activism and public engagement. These gendered discourses, she concludes, demonstrate the liminal character of Islam today, a religion that is neither a public nor a private phenomenon.

The volume is a valuable contribution in a growing body of scholarship on women's religiosity in 'the West,' which aims to bridge the existing gap on female ways of understanding, experiencing and participating in religion (whether in its institutional forms or not) today. The book is nonetheless quite unbalanced in style and quality. Whereas most articles are based on genuine research, some do not achieve the analytical insights that define other contributions. Besides, the range of topics, selection of religions, methodologies and disciplines used is somehow wide. The most illustrative example of the volume's eclecticism lays in the wide variety of geographical areas covered (from Tatarstan, to Canada, Poland, the US or the UK). Such diversity makes the reader wonder about the underlying logics of presenting all the contributions in a single volume.

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