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Authors	Coughlan, Patricia
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modernisation. The missionary-explorer believed that the key to Africa's future was the stimulation of indigenous development and good governance, which is surely not far removed from what development agencies of all hues claim to be seeking today. Gifford, indeed, is not far from that 'civilising mission' advocated by 19th century Protestant missionaries when he identifies the 'planks of modernity' as 'education, science, technology, meritocracy, democratic reform, rule of law, free-ish markets and trade' (154). It is certainly an argument with a lot of merit. I am curious to know how much new information and communications technology will contribute to this. Working in an internet café in Cotonou (Benin), I once checked the URL addresses to see what sites people were browsing. I was fascinated to discover that they were almost exclusively shopping. My most recent communications with Africa have been almost entirely through social media and, again, the content and exchange of ideas is revealing. Could it be that we have reached that moment when new ideas really take root? There is little doubt young Africans seek to be part of modernity. Having lived in Africa through some of the darkest years of the continent's history (1977-2002) without ever having succumbed to afro-pessimism, due to many of the people I got to know at close quarters in their daily struggles, I can only hope that a new Africa can emerge on its own terms. I like to think that I have seen some green shoots, notably in Ghana and Benin. This book is certainly an important challenge to the churches, and to wider African society, as it seeks a real way forward.

Patrick CLAFFEY
Wallace Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Department of Religions and Theology, Trinity College Dublin specialising in Asian and African Christianity

***Religion, Gender and the Public Sphere*, by Niamh Reilly and Stacey Scriver (eds.) New York and London, Routledge, 2014, 307pp, £95 (hardback), ISBN 0-415-4384-3**.

Situating itself at the intersection of religion, gender, and the public sphere, this book's project is to critically examine established ways of thinking about this volatile conjunction in the contemporary period. Crucial contexts include hegemonic neoliberalism, globalization, major immigration, especially into Europe, multiplying multi-cultural milieus, the post-9/11 conflation of Islam with terrorism, and moral panics about Islam, often focusing on gender binaries. Furthermore, the powerful re-emergence of various religions in recent decades has put significant pressure on gender roles and relations, private and public, and on

women's rights. This has called into question key narratives and theories of secularization as enlightenment, on which both liberal-democratic modernity and contemporary feminisms have been founded. The re-mobilization of the older "clash of civilizations" thesis (West as rational, Islam as irrational other) has also enabled the deployment of stated concern for women's rights as a stalking-horse for underlying prejudices, enabling punitive policies towards migrants, and even the waging of war in Afghanistan.

The collection is an important and timely intervention in contemporary debates on a nexus of vital issues. It ably negotiates the complexities of its theme, maintains the integrity of its project and greatly elucidates the main questions. Reilly's Introduction is an intellectually and ideologically penetrating essay on the intersection of these issues (1-17). Short section introductions and a brief Conclusion by both editors organize the complex strands of the topic. Three to five brief chapters make up each of five sections: I: Identity, Religion, Migration, and Multiculture; II: Contesting Religious Subjectivities; III: Religion, Law, and Human Rights; IV: Religion, States, and Civil Society; and V: Researching Religion, Constructing Knowledge: Theoretical Revisions and Methodological Challenges.

Key imperatives of the book are to interrogate the paradigm of secularism as a core tenet of modernity and to include gender as a category within dominant masculine and bourgeois theorization of the public sphere (Habermas, Charles Taylor), both in the much-altered contexts in Reilly 7-11). Reilly carefully traces a fault line between poststructuralist feminisms (e.g. Joan Scott, Butler) and those maintaining a critical-emancipatory paradigm (such as Nancy Fraser). Her own position, argued with clarity and conviction, favours the critical-emancipatory, though this must be continually reconfigured and actively contextualized, to achieve inclusivity and avoid domination by narrow Enlightenment rationality. Reilly sees an onus on the proponents of the secular democratic state to acknowledge and defend its status, not as inevitable but as a normative political-social ideal, and in the present and future to define its parameters and modalities in non-oppressive ways (5).

The volume offers examples of different approaches to these complex problematics. Many chapters examine concepts of secularity and narratives of secularization; these are variously explored, interrogated, critiqued, and defended. Several contributors deconstruct hitherto dominant narratives representing secularization as synonymous with advancing enlightenment and liberation. Rather, they argue, in globalized postmodernity the self-proclaimed secular Western state with its accompanying values of rationality and purported gender neutrality is in practice co-constituted with ethnic, gendered and religious Others, in a system of racialised difference: a system depending upon the othering of

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women, sexual minorities, and – in Europe – immigrants, especially Muslims.

Sarah Bracke's chapter effectively exposes blind spots and ahistorical constructions in the convergence of *laicité* with *mixité* (diversity, especially co-education) in contemporary France, drawing on Scott's powerful analysis of the politics of *hijab* debates (257-267). Bracke finds that in France the secular is too often affirmed as an unmarked standard (257-67). She draws on Talal Asad's problematization of the secular, arguing that it is itself "an epistemic category as well as a mode of governmentality" and a "set of institutions, ideas, and affective orientations" which intersect with gender (258). She also questions the "ingrained assumption" that secularism is an evident, almost natural, ally to women's emancipation & gender equality, citing Butler, Scott, and Jasbir Puar. She sharply interrogates the normative valorization of co-education in France (actually "rather new"), teasing out its occluded effect of othering Muslims as a threat to social cohesion. She critiques the all-spaces-must-be-gender-mixed advocacy of the feminist organization *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*, running counter to the legacy of positive women-only spaces in second-wave feminism (261-2). In Bracke's view, French secularism merely *seems* to transcend differences with its "abstract individualism" (Scott), while in fact inscribing differences in the nation-state, since the notion of individuality invoked is firmly masculine, bourgeois, and ethnically constituted and works to exclude what is marked as non-French.

Secularity, however, is not a monolith, but varies in character, with different versions of church-state relations in principle and in practice among liberal democracies. As Reilly notes, the containment of religion to a private sphere of personal and family life was a reaction to fears that autocratic religious authority would fuse with state power: fears, one may add, easily understood in twentieth-century Ireland (5). Such containment was incompletely realised in practice, as the visibility of religious actors on national occasions, especially of mourning and commemoration, in many countries, shows. Christianity's presence may be vestigial, but it still speaks of the foundational role of religion in most states, a situation emphasized by the recent inclusion of representatives of several faiths on such stages.

There are robust defences of critical-feminist goals. One is the superb chapter by Yuval-Davis, author of the classic *Gender and Nation* (1997). Hers is the most compelling analysis of the resurgent power of fundamentalist religions in different societies and regions, pinpointing the troubling implications for women's and human rights generally of this power, which she reads as ultimately and emphatically political in character (21-42). Likewise, "disbelief", says Naomi Goldenberg crisply, "has to be cultivated with more dedication" ("Demythologizing Gender

and Religion within Nation-States: Towards a Politics of Disbelief" (248-255). 253). Like other contributors, she insists on the patriarchal character of religion(s) in general, calling for "a revival of healthy scepticism" in feminism about the role of religion in "enforcing male dominance throughout a culture". Yuval-Davis instances, in contemporary Britain and France, the practice of embedding faith organizations within civil-society structures; this accords powerful male religious authority-figures privileged roles in such state contexts, rendering them *de facto* representatives of all persons adhering to specific religions, quite without assuring representativity (38-9).

Goldenberg also critiques a renewed or persisting tendency to accept religion on its own terms and protests the "respectful deference" accorded to religious terminology. This, she observes, permits religions to function almost as "vestigial states", enjoying influence on public governance, especially relating to private, or family, life including sexual behaviour (254). Many chapters exemplify how this bears especially upon women, whose lives and bodies are overseen and regulated by religious leaders overwhelmingly likely to be men. As Reilly observes, "politicized autocratic movements", seeking in recent decades to impose "literalist and ultraconservative versions of religious teaching through state law and policy", most often target "the sexual and reproductive freedom of women and sexual minorities": recent and current acts of "Islamic State" offer appalling examples, as does state policy in Russia, informed by resurgent conservative Christianity.

These arguments complement Breda Gray's well-informed analysis of the prominent role played by religious organizations in migrant integration in Ireland. Gray provides a detailed example of Yuval-Davis' remark that "religious devotion and neoliberalism can be seen to go hand in hand", in the post-Soviet and post-9/11 world (31). Gray illuminates the active functioning of religious-activist groups in Ireland in the postmodern context of "neoliberal rationalities and tactics of governance", exemplified by the "social partnership" arrangements regulating labour in the 1980s and 1990s, founded on concepts of community and, ultimately, patriarchal structures (212). Another specific instance of the long reach of religious authority in the contemporary world is Anka Grzywacz's chapter showing prohibitive Catholic Church power over sexual and reproductive rights in Poland, a power largely established post-1989 and sustained at the highest international level by key Vatican influence at the UN (222-231).

Both Gray and Grzywacz vest signs of hope in activism for women's rights and for gender and reproductive freedoms, Grzywacz focusing on the abortion-reform organization "Catholics for Choice"; Yuval-Davis also notes the positive role of AWID, the Association for Women's Rights in Development, the coalition of activist development

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workers in 160 countries which gathers data on women's rights in fundamentalist contexts (41). These moments of optimism echo the positive approach largely shared by contributors in the fascinating "Contesting Religious Subjectivities" section, crisply introduced by Eilís Ward, where alternative paths towards women's empowerment, the validation of transsexuality in earlier Judaeo-Christian understanding, and autonomous forms of spiritual creativity are luminously explored across Christian, Buddhist, and Sikh faiths (71-132).

The law and human rights section includes detailed analyses by Loenen (136-142) Demir Gürsel (155-167), and Stuart (180-191) of the trumping of *women's* human rights in European Court of Human Rights judgements (2008-10) by foundational *national* narratives of states in respect of religion, whatever these may be, even where they are diametrically opposed, as in the case of Ireland on the one hand and Turkey and France on the other: Catholicism and secularity respectively. Seeming paradoxical to the lay eye, this answers to statist structures. In "The Right to Freedom of Religion: Human Right or Male Right?", Stuart shows the "male lens" through which questions of religion, society and law are implicitly seen and therefore presented to the court. In these instances and others, the intersection of religion/secularity with gender is a site of evident anxiety about the sustaining of the social order in a given state The ECHR's "margin of appreciation" concept has regularly been used to privilege state exclusions, bans and gender arrangements over the experiences and rights of individual applicants seeking to vindicate their human rights and religious or reproductive freedoms. The cases respectively concerned dress and religiously-based state prohibition of abortion.

The "situated gaze" (42) and the study of women as "embedded subjects" (3) are indispensable in understanding the book's topic: accordingly, these perspectives recur throughout the collection, variously phrased and conceived. Tina Beattie, discussing the abortion rights debate in Catholicism, describes the "acute dilemmas faced by religious women… in negotiating a space of human flourishing and ethical accountability" between "secular feminists and religious authorities" (73). Beattie is registering those tensions between "liberal, rights-based understandings of freedom" and respect for women's individual choices identified by Reilly at the outset (3). Sawitri Saharso's chapter illuminates this problem with an intelligent comparison of multicultural feminist perspectives, persuasively preferring Anne Phillips' contextual approach over principle-driven and Habermasian democratic-deliberative positions (24-9). Both liberalism and culture must be contextually understood, with respect for culturally diverse individuals, not reified recognition of "things called cultures". Wherever located, we are all culturally constituted individuals. Yafa Shanneik's tactful chapter on Muslim migrant women in Ireland is

informed by such an approach, focusing on detailed experiential contexts (58-67). However, both Goldenberg and Yuval-Davis perceive a risk of valorization of women's religious practices within male-dominated religious contexts as forms of self-empowerment without sufficient problematization of these contexts. Both question the capacity of a "politics of piety" (in Saba Mahmood's phrase) genuinely to foster women's autonomous subjectivity (40, 253).

It is impossible to do justice to the full richness of this collection, or to describe or even name all the contributors, widely located and speaking from so many contexts, regions, and faith backgrounds. But the editors have done an exemplary job, eliciting a high degree of clarity and cogency from all twenty. The volume challenges one's prejudices, informs one's thinking, and powerfully illuminates its topic.

Patricia COUGHLAN
School of English, University College Cork