Book Reviews

Globalization, Gender, and Religion:The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts

Jane H. Bayes and Nayereh Tohidi, eds.
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Globalization, Gender, and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts began at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (FWCW). At this event, Jane H. Bayes and Nayereh Tohidi witnessed conservative Catholic and conservative Muslim groups unify around issues of sexuality, sexual orientation, and the control of women's bodies. To understand the spectrum of opinions and better strategize the globalized women's movement in Catholic and Muslim contexts, the editors brought together feminists from seven countries and one region to determine how religious Catholic and Muslim women dealt with their beliefs in equal rights, and contradictions in their religions and in the official policy of their religious authorities.

This book is divided into 10 chapters and contains an appendix that surveys the historical expansion of Catholicism and Islam. The introduction provides valuable information on how, since 1992, the Vatican has sought to unify with conservative Muslims to counter challenges to their shared religious ideals of women's social roles. The following chapter, "Women Redefining Modernity and Religion in the Globalized Context," is structured to answer three fundamental issues about Catholicism and Islam: How they regard women, what historical similarities and differences exist in their responses to modernity, and what is the position of women's religiosity and spirituality in social change and their agency in reshaping the parameters of modernity and religion. Ultimately, it gives a useful overview of how Catholicism and Islam perceive women and especially gives a fair treatment of Islam's uniqueness. Unlike Catholicism, Islam's lack of a singular, central, organized body makes it difficult to pinpoint the ideal female archetype. To find this ideal, the editors point to the Qur'an's prominence as the word of God and refer to 4:34 which, by calling women the "charges

of men," is often cited to justify women's subordination. By citing different scholars, Bayes and Tohidi articulate that cultural, social, and historical circumstances have impaired readings of the Qur'an and neglected its more egalitarian verses.

The United States, Ireland, Spain, and Latin America are discussed in the section on women's movements in Catholic contexts. Susan Marie Maloney's chapter on the United States gives an overview of how Catholic women negotiated space for themselves and forwarded women's rights in the male-dominated Catholic Church. The essay on Ireland, by Yvonne Galligan and Nuala Ryan, establishes the close connection between the government, the Catholic Church, and the Catholic population. They demonstrate that despite a significant drop in church attendance, the results of two referendums in the 1990s on abortion and divorce reflected support for the Catholic Church's official position. Celia Valiente argues that in Spain, opposition to the dictator Franco was more instrumental in creating progressive laws for women's rights than the minor women's right movement, because his laws on women reflected those of the Catholic Church. Laws governing violence against women, abortion, women in the workforce, and child care were expedited because of the subsequent Church–State separation.

Laura Guzmán Stein examines the papal influence in Latin America by first showing the compatibility of preexisting patriarchal and sexist legends and myths blaming women for foreign conquest, and parallels the Biblical story of Eve and the Fall from Paradise. She thereby contextualizes the inclusion of Vatican and conservative representatives in Latin American delegations to the FWCW. She highlights the exception, Costa Rica, and explains that its exclusion of the papal voice was not due to an absence of sexist-religious-cultural norms, but was attributed, in part, to Costa Rica's chequered history of civil law permitting state-funded contraceptive programs and legalized limited abortions.

Overall, a pattern emerges from these first essays: Catholicism inhibits rights, and rights occur despite Catholicism. The essays on Turkey, Iran, Bangladesh, and Egypt offer more room to debate this assumption, largely because of the absence of a central Muslim organization that issues edicts and official religious interpretations. This makes situating Islam in sociological circumstance more pertinent. However, with the exception of the chapters on Egypt and Iran, the essays continue to emphasize the secular origins of women's rights rather than any possibility of its spiritual origins. Though Heba Raouf Ezzat misleadingly states that the famous late-nine-

teenth-century Egyptian jurist Qasim Amin supported education for women (he believed girls only needed a primary school education), her concise survey of the women's movement in Egypt from a pro-faith perspective includes an analysis of the silent reform in the Islamist movement, which involves ongoing reinterpretation of religious scripture. Mehranguiz Kar openly states her belief that religion and state must remain separate in order for women's rights to occur. However, her chapter on women's movements in Iran also shows the possibility of women's rights developing through religion by describing a split among religious groups whose reinterpretation of religious doctrine has found compatibility with the secular rights movement.

Unfortunately, the essays on Turkey and Bangladesh do not articulate the diversity among different women's rights movements in the Muslim context and thus maintain the religion-as-a-rights-inhibitor paradigm. Ayse Güines-Ayata only partially describes women's marginalization in Turkey by minimizing the religious identity of Muslim women who wish to wear religious clothing and head-coverings and by implying incompatibility between the women's rights movements and women who embrace this type of Muslim identity. Since her discussion centers on the Islamist Welfare Party, which simultaneously petitioned for women's limited involvement in the public sphere along with their right to cover in schools and government offices, she implicitly associates women's diminished status with the right to cover.

This false correlation is articulated further by her misleading suggestion that Mustafa Kemal's ban on religious clothing in public aided in the universal emancipation of Turkish women. While this enforced ban increased the mobility of some women, it greatly curtailed the movement of those who felt that covering was necessary for them to negotiate space in the public sphere. She continues to neglect this other dimension of coercive uncovering by not discussing women who were forced out of government and academic positions because they asserted their right to cover in the public sphere. She makes a passing comment about court battles for this right only to illustrate the threat of religious movements to women's rights. Subsequently, Güines-Ayata does not detail any movement where women see the right to cover as a means to increase their public participation. Once again, the false binary that women who cover encompass solely conservative views on women's rights is reiterated, and the complexity and diversity of women's movements in Muslim contexts is obscured.

As scholarly works on women and Muslim contexts generally focus overwhelmingly on the Middle East, it is particularly refreshing to find

Bangladesh, a country where Islam's influence is often overlooked, present in this volume. Yet in contrast to Güines-Ayata's overestimation of secularism as a guarantee of women's rights, Najma Chowdhury, in her attempt to highlight the conflict between Islam in Bangladesh and women's rights does not describe how pre-Islamic, Hindu, and colonial influences have found compatibility with and shaped Islam in Bangladesh, and how together they have problematized women's rights. As historical, cultural, social, and economic factors vary in each country, so too does the interpretation of Islam. Thus it becomes even more pertinent and useful to articulate how different factors influence the practice of, and are upheld through, Islam, which, in turn, shape women's rights movements.

The editors claim that they do not advocate the superiority of secularism or modernity over religion or traditionalism. However, by referring to the secular FWCW as the definitive marker for women's rights, the origins of those rights also become secular. Moreover, by using a sociological rather than a confessional approach to examine religion, women's rights inevitably become defined as a product of secularism. Thus, secular society becomes the ideal world of women's rights, whereas religious society is the lived-in reality of female disadvantage. The actual reality of women's positions is attributed to a lack of secularism, not a lack of religious idealism. As women's rights are seen as secularly derived, these rights and religiosity become diametrically opposed, mutually incompatible, and unable to exist within the same framework. Subsequently, this raises the question of how religious women can be positioned in the rights movement without commenting on their religiosity or determining whether their motivations are based primarily on religious or secular beliefs.

Nonetheless, this ambitious work is a useful survey of the social and political progressions of different women's movements in Catholic and Muslim contexts, and helps place the coalition building efforts of each religion's conservative threads. It is a good reference book for studies in sociology, politics, and women studies, for it articulates and expands on traditional approaches to women's rights movements. From this, others can build to include religious motivations for participation in the rights movement.

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