

Donald L. Boisvert and Carly Daniel-Hughes (eds): *The Bloomsbury Reader in Religion, Sexuality and Gender*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 271 pp.

In recent years increasing research has been done on religion, sexuality, and gender in the field of religious studies. Some of it is presented in readers like this one. However, *The Bloomsbury Reader in Religion, Sexuality and Gender* introduces this theme for undergraduate students and provides teachers with a guidebook for seminars, and this has not previously been done. The reader is divided into three main themes: 'Bodies', 'Desires', and 'Performances'. Each section starts with an introduction, follows with readings, and closes with discussion questions which can be used either individually by students or to lead group discussions. The readings in every section are kept short and do not include any footnotes or endnotes, which is done deliberately to have the authors' main argument as the focus of the students' attention.

The editors believe that this book will be used mainly in North American and Western European contexts, and the readings are chosen to be familiar to students or related to their cultural histories. This means most of the readings are situated in a Western context. Some diversity is provided, mostly in a religious context, as with a reading on *niddah* by Chava Weissler, a reading on masculinity, sex, and the body in Indian Buddhism by John Pow-

ers, and a reading on sexuality and religiosity in Colonial Mexico by Zeb Tortoici. Nevertheless, to use this reader as an introductory book on this theme, it would have been essential for the editors to have strived for more diversity, not only in religious contexts, but also in different cultural settings for the sake of including different perspectives on gender and sexuality. For example, the introduction on feminist studies only has a short paragraph on criticism from feminists of colour. The concept of intersectionality is never mentioned, not even in the glossary, and key turning points such as the speech by Sojourner Truth, 'Ain't I a Woman', are omitted. Furthermore, the reader would have been more diverse and less white if, in addition to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, critical thinkers like Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Y. Davis, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, or Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí had been included.

However, despite these problems, the reader does give space to the historical context by starting with a reading on 'Stereotypes, False Images, Terrorism: The White Assault upon Black Sexuality' by Kelly Brown Douglas. Douglas writes on the influence of slavery on black female and male bodies and the black church and community in the United States. Using a theological framework, she describes stereotypes born out of slavery that continue to influence black women's and men's daily lives and religiosities today. It is great that the reader

starts with a well-known theologian who criticises white patriarchal hegemony, but it is a missed opportunity to omit the academic historical background of black feminism and postcolonial studies.

The section on 'Bodies' continues with a focus on how the body is represented and interpreted in religious traditions. Embodiment is a key aspect of this section, which returns, for example, in the reading on sin, weight loss, and sexual reorientation by Lynne Gerber. Various theoretical approaches are used in the readings; however, most take a theological approach and examine religious texts, laws, or scriptures. For students or courses in related fields more readings with methods such as interviews or participant observation would have been interesting, especially in relation to embodiment and sensitive topics such as the body.

Part Two of the reader continues with the theme 'Desires'. It focuses on the 'connections between religious life, practices and the erotic'. Topics discussed in this section are, among others: homosexuality, heterosexuality, heteronormativity, and sexual activity. As stated in the introduction of the book, several theoretical approaches are highlighted in the reader: feminist; gender critical; and queer. Several readings in 'Desires' especially focus on queer theory, and the reader broadens the scope to religion, gender, and sexuality. The section starts with a chapter by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discussing the limitations of concepts such

as homo- and heterosexuality and reframing questions from what certain concepts mean to how certain categorisations work, how they are performed, and how they relate to each other. This is a well-chosen introductory chapter to critical thinking and queer theory. What follows is a short excerpt from Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978), which starts to relate religion to sexuality and discourses of power. 'Desires' closes with two readings which focus on queer theory in different ways. Mark. D. Joan examines how religious desire is framed and intersects with sexuality and same-sex sexuality in a Christian context, and Zeb Tortorici finishes 'Desires' with a reading on sexuality and religiosity in colonial Mexico. Besides its various theoretical approaches 'Desires' is quite diverse concerning different religious contexts and practices: it includes discussions on Japanese Buddhism, the Talmud, and Pentecostalism in the United States.

The third and last section of the book is 'Performances'. This part highlights the intersections between gender and sexuality and the ways in which religion can enable people to transgress normative views. It starts with a chapter by Judith Butler from her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) and continues with several readings exemplifying the different forms sexuality and gender can take in relation to religion. The discussion of the binary divisions of female/male, feminine/masculine, and heterosexual/homosexual is

also scrutinised. A concept missing from the introduction of this section is agency, whereas most of its readings highlight how certain religious practices can provide agency. For example, the reading by Karen McCarthy Brown on Haitian Vodou in North America, where women can rely on intimate bonds with spirits, and the reading by Gayatri Reddy on the Indian hijra community both touch on this topic. Once again, this is a missed opportunity to bring in some key concepts from the field of gender studies.

To conclude, this reader provides a short and concise introduction in 271 pages to the theme of religion, gender, and sexuality for undergraduate students. Some theoretical and critical texts, such as the reading by Foucault or Butler, are abridged in a way that makes them feasible for students who have never heard of their work. Additionally, the discussion questions at the end of each section emphasise some key issues in the field. However, it must be said that although the readings discuss different religious traditions, there could have been more diversity, especially with an emphasis on the discussion of gender and sexuality and its historical academic background in areas such as black feminism and postcolonial studies. Most of the readings also provide theological arguments and approaches, and for courses and students in related study fields this may prove limited. That said, it is great to finally have a reader on this theme for students to start with.

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