

BOOK REVIEW

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Basia Spalek and Alia Imtoul. (Eds.) 2008. Religion, Spirituality and the Social Sciences: Challenging Marginalisation. Bristol: Policy Press. pp. 208. ISBN 978-1-84742-041-1.

'A Sparkling Mosaic'

Judging a book by its cover is not something one is encouraged to do. However, the cover image on *Religion, Spirituality and the Social Sciences*—emanating blue mosaic fragments that spiral out from an indefinite centre—aptly reflects the direction and cohesion of the many voices in this fourteen-chaptered book.

Mere utterances of the word 'religion', let alone attempts to incorporate understandings of it into the social sciences in the early 21st century Western university, have been enough to cast suspicion. It is therefore timely, necessary and brave of Spalek and Imtoul to bring together this collection of opinions and research on both religion and spirituality. In my own field of visual art and design history and theory, these issues are simultaneously hidden and visible. The 'accepted' visibility of religion is where it is conveniently a part of art history and consequently neatly dealt with in retrospect. But the re-emergence of the spirit and its spirituality within an articulated world of creativity is no longer possible to ignore. There is obviously a need for something more than objective intellectual engagement and this is nowhere more pertinent than in critical race and whiteness studies,

which touch upon all disciplines and practices.

Religion, Spirituality and the Social Sciences: Challenging Marginalisation challenges the way in which established religions, in the UK and Australia for example, retain hegemonic status. This is done under a cloak of secularism which is used to disguise dominant politico-religious practice. As such, what transpires from this book is that power relations are constantly at work. The selection of chapters comes together in a way that resonates with Michel Foucault's genealogical approach. This approach draws upon different historical and methodological examples and can be used to cast perspective on the way in which religion, state, politics and education operate in conjunctions of power (2007). Despite the ironies of a type of sanctimonious secularism in countries such as Australia and the UK, Spalek and Imtoul's book shows that it is not possible to quash the human soul and its thirst for spiritual nourishment. Initiatives to provide insight into faith identities constitute a counter freedom movement, which this volume contributes towards now. Secularism has been a convenient disguise for the 'disciplinisation' and separation of knowledges that the university tried to achieve in the past (Foucault, 2004, 183).

The book sparkles with the hope of voices that speak out for belief and against suppression. In this vein, discussions of spiritualit(ies) is especially

positive in the light of institutionalised religions and the colonising process. For example, Ursula King's chapter: 'Spirituality and gender viewed through a global lens' contributes to a redefinition of spirituality within re-emerging concepts of the goddess and feminist spirituality. Aspects of Ancestralism and ritual are similarly evoked as 'symbolic forms of resistance' in Maria Frahm-Arp's chapter when they come together with forms of Christianity in the African independent churches. Gordon Lynch writes a brilliant chapter entitled 'Dreams of the autonomous and reflexive self: the religious significance of contemporary and lifestyle media' in which he tackles the rapid changes in role models and comments on the notion of 'experts' in late modernity. The modernising processes of life, and beliefs beyond life, crop up often in the book. Changes wrought by modernity show that the need for another reality finds expression in many different observances. The re-emergence of faith is said to be 'shy' but resilient in Adam Possamai's chapter, who argues that religion is present but at times 'invisible'. Lynch shows how Thomas Luckman's notion of 'invisible religion' also helps to make sense of the limited 'horizons of this life', however Lynch is careful to note that simplifications will only result in an even more problematic and generic religious 'world-view'.

The precise clarity of each chapter's voice, whether or not some resonate with others, is what gives credence to this book. There is certainly no homogenous view of religion and spirituality put forward here. Instead, there is a careful interrogation into content and methods so that faith and spirituality can be incorporated into social science curricula with respect and ethics. Methodologies that combine

both qualitative and quantitative measures are brought to bear upon the research; this is especially evident in part three of the book. Miguel Farias and Elisabeth Hense produce a thorough investigation into ethno-categories and misconceptions regarding data on the terms 'religious' and 'spiritual'. This analysis is followed by Muzammil Quraishi's gripping account of his own research experience during months of full-time work amongst Muslim prisoners in the UK. Aspects of race, class and language reverberate around trust and suspicion in the confined environment of the prison, which provides the perfect micro-panoptic for the remainder of society. Consequently this chapter is well placed towards the end of the book where it casts light on other methods of surveillance operating against faith communities in seemingly innocuous ways.

I have called this review 'a sparkling mosaic' because the pieces of blue glazed ceramic tiles on the cover image glisten with individual shards of embedded and reflective tones. This is also true of the chapters and voices within them which constitute the compositional elements of what will hopefully stimulate more work of this nature. The inside/outside tensions of belief and faith in a world that is cautioned by scepticism and policed by secularism are shown in sensitive balance. At the heart of all societies are the individual people and their 'souls'. 'The soul, the breath, is something that can be disturbed and over which the outside can exercise a hold. One must avoid dispersal of the soul, the breath' (Foucault, 2005, 47). As such this edited volume confronts ideas on eschatology in a way that maintains its fragility but sustains its importance as a factor to be included in studies of society.

Religion, Spirituality and the Social Sciences is a book that can be read and used for many different degrees and courses in the social sciences. It is remarkably well structured. The excellent introductory and concluding chapters by the editors, careful commentaries between each section, in addition the bibliographies and index make it an extremely accessible and functional volume.

Author Note

Kathleen Connellan is currently a portfolio leader of research in the School of Art, Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia. Her research focuses on two main areas: design and colour theory, and critical race and whiteness studies. She is on the editorial panel of the journal of *Visual Design Scholarship*, is vice president of the

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