March, 2007

Review of Mark Juergensmeyer (ed.), Religion in Global Civil Society

David Cook-Martín, Grinnell College

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/dcookmartin/10/
DAVID COOK MARTÍN
University of California, Irvine
dcook@ucla.edu

Is religion constitutionally opposed to globalization? The essays in Religion in Global Civil Society (RGCS) insightfully wrestle with several versions of this question and collectively offer a qualified response. Religion plays a range of roles in globalization, positive or negative depending on the extent to which it and global civil society are understood in narrow organizational terms or religion as a broadly shared sense of spirituality and morality. These roles include religion as: (a) organized communities of faith that integrate a highly mobile world population; (b) a purveyor of common values necessary for sociality; (c) a legitimating ideology for those who politically and sometimes violently oppose the hegemony of particular members of the modern state system; (d) a prophetic or critical standpoint from which to assess globalization’s negative effects, and propose alternative visions of a just society. When religion is viewed in the restricted organizational sense, one is likely to observe a “clash of civilizations,” but when it is understood more broadly, a “coalition of civilizations” is possible. So runs the argument.

The book’s main contribution is to forefront the ethical dilemmas and possibilities faced by religion in an increasingly interconnected world, and to document the contradictions of religious responses to globalization. For instance, An-Na’im examines how the politics of religion can serve as a constraint on worldwide economic processes that have negative consequences on the world’s poor, and Tipton how a state-transcending civil religion can free people to question religions steeped in a nationalist view of morality. By uncovering the complexity of responses to globalization (e.g., Rosefsky Wickham on Islamist alternatives to globalization) and illustrating the construction of a broad sense of spirituality (Bounds and Patterson on intercultural dialogue in school settings), empirically based chapters extend current debates about the ways in which religion may recast modernity or constitute a basis for new solidarities. Other chapters illustrate how religious organizations and identifications that reject globalization’s secularizing influence have ironically emerged from the confrontation with religious others facilitated by easy and frequent communications.

RGCS also makes some useful conceptual contributions. Juergensmeyer’s typology of radical religious movements according to how they confront globalization processes and their orientation to the international state system (state-seeking/reforming, state-challenging, and transnational antiglobalists) is a useful way to parse up non-western religious radicals or fundamentalists, the underlying concern of several chapters. Peter Berger tackles some of the more vexing definitional problems faced by religion and globalization scholarship with clarity and wit. Unfortunately, other contributors fail to make consistent use of Berger’s conceptual toolkit, and the exposition is less cohesive as a result. A reluctance to conceptually delimit religion and global civil society may have been warranted during the research phase, but the absence of a theoretical lingua franca in the final write-up forces readers to do considerable analytical work, and gives the unwarranted impression that the book is only more “chatter about global civil society” as Keane has put
it. Further, those looking for a sustained and systematic engagement of a burgeoning sociological literature on religion, secularization, fundamentalism, and globalization will be disappointed, and will have to ponder precisely on how this collection extends, challenges, or recasts broader debates.

Also problematic is the reliance of crucial passages on debatable “covering laws.” The “fading-states” narrative is the best example. It goes thus: when globalization increases, state sovereignty declines, and religion is reconfigured to reflect new conditions. The Weberian notion that polity and religiosity shape each other is axiomatic, but it is by no means a foregone conclusion that: (a) globalization—its requiring specification—has diminished the nation-state or that (b) a state-transcending religious field has emerged to fill a gap. Concerning (a), Mann (2002) argues convincingly that nation-states are not being undermined by globalization, but in fact constitute it through ideological, economic, military, and political power at different levels (local, national, international, macro-regional, transnational, and global).

Concerning (b), religious organizations and beliefs in the age of migration may span political jurisdictions in arguably unprecedented ways, but they are not above them. Official policies that regulate nationally circumscribed sacred markets refashion theologies, cosmologies, and rituals in the image of Western religion. Research in the U.S. context, for instance, shows that nonwestern religions like Hinduism, and even Latin American Protestantism—presumably more like native religion than other migrant faiths—find their organizational structures, theologies, and ritual practices significantly altered as they seek to comply with official tax regulations steeped in a North American Congregationalist and nonprofit model. To take for granted the fading of states and the concomitant rise of a new brand of transnational religion distracts scholars from critical questions: how do polities shape and how are they shaped by religion under conditions of increased population and information flows, at what levels, and with what specific effects on religious belief, practice, and organization?

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, I recommend this well-written text for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses on contemporary topics in the sociology of religion, and globalization. Select chapters could gainfully be read alongside overviews of pertinent literatures, and bringing the two into dialogue may in itself be a helpful heuristic activity. Readers interested in the normative dimensions of religion in an emerging world society will find this book especially valuable. All will come away better informed and more sensitive to the dilemmas inherent to a phenomenon that adherents see as locally rooted, but which is conditioned by universal integrative processes.

**Reference**


Laura T. Reynolds

Colorado State University

To understand Africa’s current location in the global economy, Gibbon and Ponte eschew a traditional national development focus and analyze the insertion of local enterprises in global commodity circuits. This book integrates a theoretical discussion of new patterns of economic coordination in what they call the “age of global capitalism” with detailed empirical analysis of the role of African enterprises in six major export commodity chains. The authors shed new light on the workings of the global economy and the processes which have undermined Africa’s economic position over the past fifty years.

Gibbon and Ponte analyze the contours of the global economy, focusing on the erosion of public forms of governance—including state and multilateral regulatory frameworks—and the rising power of private forms of governance—including dominant firm regulation of suppliers and new business standards. The book outlines the recent rise of global neo-liberal policies institutionalized under the guidance of the World Trade Organization (WTO), arguing that this new trade regime opened national markets and