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Book Review: The Governance of Religious Diversity.

Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity. Edited by **Anna Triandafyllidou and Tina Magazzini**, London and New York: Routledge, 2021

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The *Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity* examines state-religion relations in more than 20 countries across the world. It particularly looks at how these states manage religious diversity. This book discusses that, in ancient times, empires and kingdoms, which were the embodiment of the states, used religion as a tool to control people. In modern times, many countries have become more secularized, hence the role of religion as a tool of control has diminished. States increasingly neglect the role of religion and religious people in society. This book argues that states with secularist ideology still need to pay attention to the role of religion in society.

This book covers six regions in the world: Western Europe, Southern Europe, Central Eastern Europe and Russia, South-Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific. A total of 25 scholars contributes case studies covering these regions, giving this book wide coverage and rich data on the challenges and opportunities that the states around the world encounter in managing religious diversity. Naturally, this variety also poses a problem: there are many variations in the authors' perspectives, so it is advised that readers should read not just one or two chapters but many in order to enhance their understanding on the diversity of approaches to managing relationships between state and religion.

The chapters from the book that should be highlighted here focus on South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific region. In particular, this book emphasizes states managing religious diversity in India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia. These countries are large countries, but they cannot be used to represent the region. Incorporating Malaysia and Indonesia study cases in this book is redundant, because the states in the two countries face similar problem: Malaysia and Indonesia are both Muslim majority countries that are struggling to cope with the social and political problems stemming from Islamic radicalization.¹ Instead, Myanmar should be included in this book to ensure that it better represents states' efforts in managing religious diversity in the region. Why? First, the case of Myanmar is different to those of Indonesia and Malaysia. While Indonesia and Malaysia face the similar problems of inter-religious conflict in the form of Islamic radicalization, Myanmar faces inter-religious conflict between the minority Muslim Rohingyas and the

¹ Tiandafyllidou and Magazzini 2021,7.

majority Buddhists. Second, state management of religious affairs in Indonesia is based on secular nationalism, because Indonesia was not established by a certain ethnic majority but from the shared memory of colonialism. In contrast, the Myanmar state applies an ethnonationalist model in managing religious affairs because the state is shaped by the Burmese ethnic majority. The largest ethnic group in Myanmar governs religious affairs in line with their needs, and they often deny the rights of minority religions.²

This book pays much attention to state management of religious diversity in Europe, with 14 out of 23 chapters focusing on this region. Despite this, the chapters do not represent well the region, as Scandinavian countries are excluded. These chapters also fail to introduce new narratives, and instead continue to propagate segregation between religion and state, arguing that religion should be private and not expressed in the public sphere. On the other hand, the chapters nicely and aptly discuss the most pressing and contentious issue that Europeans face today: the rise of religious intolerance. In the past, European countries initiated secular state models, in which the state distances itself from managing religious affairs while still respecting its citizens' religious rights, including the rights of minority religions. But the rights of many immigrants from the Middle East to practice their religious beliefs in public are not always upheld. For example, some European countries rejected Syrian asylum seekers from accessing social and economic protection. This rejection implies that some European countries are becoming increasingly intolerant. The book's editors, Anna Triandafyllidou and Tina Magazzini, touch on the issue in the introduction section, stating: "But both religion and religious intolerance are returning to European society and politics through multiple channels. These channels include the dynamics of international migration and the 'new' religions – notably Islam, even though there is a long pedigree of that faith and its adherents in Europe going back many centuries – that accompany such migration."

Another problem with this book is that the United States (US) and many African nations are excluded. The US is important for inclusion because, as one of the biggest secular-states in the world, its population are diverse in term of religion. Exploring how the US (at both the federal and state levels) manages religious diversity can provide good lessons for other countries in the rest of the world. On Africa, this book only discusses states managing religious diversity in the northern part of Africa, such as Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco; other parts of the continents are exempted. To obtain a complete picture, this book should include chapters that explore state managing religious diversity in other parts of the African continent.

Nevertheless, this book is still worthy read. The majority of chapters are written by scholars who live in the countries discussed, and their immense knowledge and understanding on social and political systems results in accurate and deeply detailed discussions on how states manage religious diversity. This boosts quality of this book.

² Walker Connor 1973, 1.

References

Connor, Walker. "The Politics of Ethnonationalism." *Journal of International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1973): 1–21.

Triandafyllidou, Anna, and Tina Magazzini. *Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity*. Routledge International Handbooks. Abingdon New York (N.Y.): Routledge, 2021.