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## BOOK REVIEW

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Barker, Eileen, and Beth Singler, eds. 2022. *Radical Transformations of Minority Religions*. London: Routledge. xv + 275 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-78670-6. £120.00 (hbk).

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Although all seventeen chapters in this edited collection are clearly focused on transformations in minority religions, they also add considerably to our understanding of continuity in religious movements which have survived, in some cases, for many decades. It also provides a bridge between some of the earliest research in this field and some of the most recent fieldwork on emerging groups and networks. Moreover, the chapters bring together a variety of disciplinary perspectives and an impressive range of case studies.

The volume fits organically into the Routledge/Inform series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements that Eileen Barker has been editing for many years. It also dovetails neatly with her own edited volume on *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements* (2013). Readers who are familiar with this series or with Inform, the research centre which hosts the series, are likely to approach the new addition to its list with high expectations. They will not be disappointed. The series has a deservedly good reputation for combining scholarly integrity with a determination to tackle topics that may be regarded as controversial or contentious.

Eileen Barker and Beth Singler have forged a book in four parts that is well-balanced in various ways. It covers a wide range of minority religions. Its contributors come from many different countries and from different standpoints: some are insiders, some are ex-members, others have no personal connection with minority religions, some are highly experienced researchers, while others are relatively new in the field. At the same time, the balance between contributors' different strategies is sound: some chapters have a narrative format, whereas others are focused on conceptual or theoretical issues.

Edited volumes with a wide diversity of contributors, minority religions and intellectual aims run the risk of lacking a common focus, but Beth Singler's introductory chapter succeeds in pulling all the chapters together within a flexible framework. She weaves the strands together in a persuasive fashion without imposing on them a rigid organization. But there is a surprising omission: the word "radical" appears only in passing in her introduction despite its prominence in the book's title. No attempt is made to analyse its possible meanings in relation to minority religions.

This volume has many strengths, one of which is that some of the chapters are testimony to the value of long-term study of particular minority religions. Indeed, there is a

delicious irony in the fact that one of the most innovative chapters is written by one of the most experienced researchers. Eileen Barker's careful examination of the contexts in which the sexual abuse of children was allowed to happen in three minority religions and in which some people were eventually able to radically change the situation is a testament to the virtue of studying the same movements over long periods of time. Her main question was "What did they do about it?". This is a simple but ingenious approach which yields some surprising findings. And they fully justify the use of the word "radical" to describe the extent to which transformation was made to happen in various ways in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Children of God and the Jesus Fellowship Church.

Other chapters also demonstrate the value of long-term, methodical study of particular minority religions. Examples include Claire Borowik's latest update on the implications of the truly radical reboot of the Family International as well as of Andrew Dawson's long-term monitoring of developments in the Brazilian movement of Santo Daime—especially its many kinds of diversification and its shift from a collective to a more subjectivized response to globalization. Although some readers may find the prose of Dawson's chapter impenetrable in places, the findings are worth struggling for.

Other chapters are notable either for their focus on previously unstudied movements or for their use of new methods of research. The most eye-catching is the chapter by Stefano Bigliardi, Fabrizio Lorusso and Stefano Morrone on different patterns of ritual change in two main centres of the Mexican *Santa Muerte* movement. There are also some tantalizing but unexplored links between these changes and the phenomenon of "ret-conning" that Beth Singler identifies in her chapter on Jediism. This refers to the intriguing idea that the cultural and commercial aspects of the *Star Wars* industry are being retroactively "corrected" (or "ret-conned") by its owners in the face of a real-world movement of Jedis. This amounts to re-writing the history of the *Star Wars* universe in such a way that audiences would accept that this is the way it had always been. This tension between the original and the modified canon is one of the forces transforming the Jedi movement—and many other movements including the followers of the American spiritual leader Andrew Cohen. André van der Braak's chapter on the radical transformations of this movement, originally called the Moksha Foundation, breaks new ground. As does David Robertson's chapter on Samael Aun Weor's Gnostic movement.

No edited collection is perfect, and this volume is no different. As mentioned earlier, it is unclear whether all or many of the transformations analysed in this book deserve to be called "radical". Some undoubtedly are; others are not. But the opportunity for a debate about the significance of "radical" in relation to minority religions was missed. And, while the variety of movements covered in the book is impressive, no examples are taken from important areas of the world such as Japan, Africa, the Middle East and China.

Nevertheless, every chapter raises interesting questions. Some, like Cranmer and Sandberg's chapter on legal regulation, challenge any complacency about the legal struggles that still face minority religions in spite of the introduction of legal protections for human rights and equalities. Others, like Karl Seigfried's chapter on Ásatrú and the broader system of Heathenry, shock us into recognizing that notions of "race" can still be implicated in "religion". And Eugene Gallagher's chapter on Satanist movements reminds us helpfully that not all transformations succeed or lead to schisms.

In short, this is a wide-ranging, innovative and authoritative book that will be rewarding for all people with scholarly or other interests in minority religions.