
BOOK REVIEW

Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion, by Elizabeth Shakman Hurd. Princeton University Press, 2015. xvi+200 pp., Hb., \$22.20
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This book is a timely contribution to the discourse on politics of religion. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd starts with the observation of the current global trend of international projects, promoted especially by the United States, Canada, and several European states, to disseminate religious freedom, interfaith understanding, and toleration. This enterprise does not simply work on a pre-existing category of “religion.” Religious freedom not only protects religious believers, but constructs the very object it wants to protect by singling out the religious as the main identity marker. It defines the range (world religions, indigenous religions) and characteristics (belief, practice) of acceptable religion. It is thus not simply a universal ideal that guarantees free space for all religions from a neutral standpoint, but itself is a religious governance, a particular mode of governing social difference, with many consequences.

This is the description of *governed religion*, constructed by states as well as non-governmental and religious organizations for purposes of governance. Governed religion is the first type of religion in Hurd’s useful typology. The second is *expert religion*, which fulfils the need for knowledge to “understand” religion and, similarly, constructs what it wants to study. The two types are contrasted with a diverse and multiform field of *lived religion*, associated with a broader social field of religious practices. This typology motivates a way of thinking that emphasizes the contingency of governed religion, especially; at the same time it is helpful for students of religious studies, as it gives excellent illustrations of a long-standing issue in the field concerning the elusiveness of defining religion and the need to capture broader and more interesting ‘religious’ phenomena.

Chapters 2 through 5 carry out this interrogation through examination of a number of well-chosen case studies. The case of the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria illustrates the underlying notion of “two faces of faith”, which replaces the thesis of secularization as privatization. This idea posits religion in the public, but one with two faces: a source

of problems (violence, conflicts, terrorism) and solutions (interfaith cooperation, religion for development). Good religion is to be engaged; bad religion is to be marginalized. The case prompts questions: who determines good or bad? based on whose interests? and what is the impact on the religious community?

The Rohingya example shows how multi-faceted, complex issues involving racial, political and economic competitions are narrowed down to religious identity. As such the solution offered is religious freedom. Not only does the analysis oversimplify complex causation, but by fixing religion as the most prominent identity-marker, other modes of belonging are trumped and differences are exacerbated rather than resolved. In the Rohingya case, it is a reinforcement of the hard-line Buddhist monks' narrative, which accentuates Muslim-Buddhist religious difference as a basis for practices that privilege the majority Buddhists. Dethroning the category of "religion" from its prominence opens up a more encompassing analytical field to better understand the exclusion of the community, and thus suggest a more encompassing solution as well.

Another instructive illustration is the indigenous community K'iche in Guatemala who opposed mining and hydroelectric projects in their region. As a result, they have experienced discrimination, violence and violations of their land rights. The abuse of their land, facilitated by collusion among corporations, the police and the state, is the abuse of their "religion," yet it can hardly register as violation of religious freedom because, first, they are perceived as having no religion and, not less importantly, such violations of religio-cultural heritage are *not* about the right to believe, which underlies the idea of religious freedom. Thus the 2012 US International Religious Freedom Report for Guatemala says there were "no reports of abuses of religious freedom" (51). The notion that belief is the primary subject of religious freedom poses another set of problems and distances it from lived religion.

What is the alternative? How are we to guarantee religious freedom and reduce religious conflicts? For Hurd it is not intellectually viable nor politically advisable to respond to the questions. In a way, religious freedom is impossible, due to the impossibility of stabilizing a definition of religion, without betraying the rich diversity of lived religion. An expansion of religious freedom to include para-religious phenomena is not a solution. Quoting Rosalind Hackett on African indigenous religions as "religious freedom misfits," such an attempt would basically hegemonize them, while foreclosing alternative political projects. Ultimately, "those interested in thinking critically

and historically about the politics of international human rights need to avoid reproducing, in the guise of protecting human flourishing, those normative distinctions and discourses that stand most in need of interrogation and politicization" (63).

Hurd's cautionary tale, if it ends with rejection of alternatives, may be a counsel of pessimism, or even cynicism—such as her depiction of groups like the Ahmadis or the Rohingyas as “reaping the benefits of being classified by the state or other power brokers as religions, faith communities, or (persecuted) religionists” and being “showered with material and institutional benefits from state and international donors” (113). But the tale, while not offering alternatives, may actually serve as a valuable source to continually broaden the discourse.

While Hurd has convincingly argued that religious freedom is a type of religious governance, it is also clear that many states have employed different types of religious governance for a long time, which in many senses are not less problematic, to say the least. In this regard, the international human rights regime may be an important means to destabilize and problematise governed religion.

To take the example of religious governance in Muslim majority Indonesia, one would see the influence of the country's colonial past, but also internal Muslim debates about the state-religion relationship since the time of its independence in 1945. The options were a form of “Islamic state”, a secular one, or, the accepted compromise, a hybrid state with delimited pluralism, which recognizes world religions but discriminates against their non-mainstream expressions and the indigenous religions. After the move toward democratization in 1998, the language of religious freedom has been an important source to make the governance more inclusive and democratic. It is true, in some cases this language may be a distraction in dealing with conflicts designated as “religious,” since it obscures the “non-religious” factors that are more salient. But in other cases it enables the expansion of the scope of recognition beyond constraints set in the national context.

What is important, then, is to look further at particular local cases to identify spaces in which religious freedom empowers and those in which one should broaden the analysis. The alternatives may not be, as Hurd correctly argues, one form of religious governance replacing another, but a variety of interpretive lenses and the flexibility to switch between them while moving in a contoured space and responding to a variety of issues. An example for this is the inter-disciplinary debate taking place between scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution and human rights.

Such flexibility, which does not discard religious freedom but treats it as one among many available interpretive lenses, seems to accord more with Hurd's intention "to constantly problematize a clean juxtaposition between everyday and official religion even while relying on these distinctions as heuristic devices that allow us to ask new kinds of questions, pressing the field in new directions" (14).