

RELIGION AND RADICALISM

Rape Culture, Gender Violence, & Religion

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

EDITED BY CAROLINE BLYTH,
EMILY COLGAN, KATIE B. EDWARDS



Religion and Radicalism

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PREFACE

Back in 2014, two of us (Emily and Caroline) met up to discuss the possibility of co-editing a single volume that explored the complex and multifaceted relationships between rape culture, gender violence, and religion. After putting out a general call for papers, we were inundated with responses; these came from academics, practitioners, and graduate students, located throughout the globe, who were working in a disparate range of disciplinary areas, including religious studies, biblical studies, anthropology, philosophy, education, film production, gender studies, sociology, theology, linguistics, and counselling. It quickly became clear that there were simply too many essential voices and perspectives to be contained within a single volume; there was obviously a thirst for scholarly and praxis-led engagement within this area. Most of the potential contributors who contacted us expressed their appreciation that we sought to provide a platform upon which to participate in this conversation. Acutely aware that our scholarly research and practice is carried out in the context of a global rape culture, where gender violence has reached epidemic levels, the overwhelming feedback we received was that such a conversation was well overdue and therefore urgent.

As we began to collate the chapter abstracts we had been sent, we were struck by two realizations. First, these abstracts fell within three main categories, engaging with the subject of gender violence and rape culture from either biblical, Christian, or interdisciplinary perspectives. This offered us a natural structure for arranging the chapters into not one but three volumes, which we hoped would be published as a stand-alone series. Second, in light of the way this project had expanded beyond our

initial expectations, we decided it was prudent to bring in another co-editor whose expertise in this area would help us manage this ambitious project. We therefore invited Katie to join the editorial team, and to our delight, she agreed. Working together, we have pooled our editorial skills and experience to produce three volumes that we believe are an immensely timely contribution to an ongoing international dialogue within this field of research.

The three volumes can be read either together or independently of each other; each one provides a rich overview of some of the unique scholarship being carried out in a range of disciplinary areas. Together or apart, the volumes are not exhaustive in their analysis of rape culture, gender violence, and religion; given the massive complexity of these subjects and the infinite ways in which they intersect, even three volumes can only ever be a drop in the scholarly ocean. Rather, our intention is to offer readers a way to begin or continue conversations about this vital issue. As you read through the chapters in this volume, we hope that you are inspired to create conversations within your own contexts and communities.

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Ngā mihi aroha.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Ramona Boodoosingh is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Nursing and Health Science at the National University of Samoa, where she received her PhD. Her doctoral studies explored the support services available to victims of gender-based violence in developing countries, focusing on the experiences of women in Samoa and Fiji. Her research interests include gender-based violence and health literacy. She has been the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship and a Caribbean Pacific Mobility Exchange Scheme Scholarship. She is currently part of a research team investigating the role of Samoan churches in tackling gender-based violence, which is being funded by the New Zealand Institute for Pacific Research.

Emily Colgan is a Lecturer in Theology at Trinity Methodist Theological College in Auckland. Her research focuses on the relationship between the Bible and contemporary social imaginaries, asking about the degree to which the ideologies contained within biblical texts continue to inform communities in the present. Emily is particularly interested in ecological representations in the Bible, as well as depictions of gender and violence. She is the author of a number of published essays and articles in this area of scholarship.

Jane Davidson-Ladd is a Curator and art historian. Currently a PhD candidate at the University of Auckland, her thesis considers the place of English artist Louis John Steele (1842–1918) in New Zealand art. During her time as a curator at Auckland Art Gallery from 2002–2012, she curated exhibitions which explored New Zealand art history, with a special focus on the nineteenth century. She also published in this area, most recently contributing two chapters to *Gottfried Lindauer's New Zealand: The Māori Portraits* (2016).

Katie B. Edwards is Director of the Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies (SIIBS) and senior lecturer in the School of English at the University of Sheffield. Her research focuses on the function, impact, and influence of the Bible in contemporary culture. She is especially concerned with intersections of gender, race, and class in popular cultural re-appropriations of biblical characters and narratives. She is current co-editor of the *Biblical Reception* journal (Bloomsbury) and co-leads the Shiloh Project, an interdisciplinary research group exploring the intersections between rape culture and religion (<http://shiloh-project.group.shef.ac.uk/>).

Breann Fallon is a postgraduate teaching fellow in the Studies in Religion department at the University of Sydney. Her main area of research is religion and violence, particularly genocide, but she also has interest in the areas of religion and film, religion and art, and New Religious Movements. Breann is also an associate editor for the Religious Studies Project, an international collaborative programme producing weekly podcasts with leading scholars on the social-scientific study of religion.

David Hare is a graduate of the University of Auckland, where he studied Theological and Religious Studies and Politics and International Relations. David's previous work with victims of the sex slave trade in Kolkata, India, led him to university with a view to researching the

structural issues behind impoverishment and the theological and political implications of social justice. He wishes to continue his studies by taking a Master's degree in Public Policy. He is currently Secretary for Rongopai House Community Trust, an organization focused on *wahine* (women) empowerment and *whanau* (family) restoration in Northland, New Zealand.

Valerie Hobbs is Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the University of Sheffield and a member of the Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies and The Shiloh Project (<http://shiloh-project.group.shef.ac.uk/>). Her research focuses on religious discourse, particularly the ways in which Christians talk about gender roles. She is currently working on a book about how pastors preach about women.

Prior McRae recently received his Bachelor of Arts in English and Latin at the University of Auckland. Since finishing his studies he feels no more discernably English or Latin, and has decided to take up salmon farming in the south of France. He is occasionally mistaken for a better man, but not very often.

Galumalemana Steven Percival is a Samoan matai, an independent film maker and photographer, and director of Multimedia Production at the Tiapapata Art Centre, Samoa. His recent works include *Sisi le La'afa: O se sailiiga i le sauāina o tinā ma tama'ita'i i Samoa* (*Raise the Sennit Sail: Exploring Violence against Women and Girls in Samoa*) in 2015, and *E Au le Ina'ilau a Tama'ita'i: Gender Equality Issues in Samoa* (2013).

Jean Louis Rallu is a former researcher at the Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques, Paris, where he worked as a demographer studying historical and contemporary population trends in the Pacific Islands. He previously worked as a researcher at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji, the Australian National University, and spent three years serving as a Population and Development Advisor at the Pacific UNFPA Office in Fiji. He is the author of *Les Populations Océaniques aux 19ème et 20ème siècles* (INED, 1990) and has recently completed translating and editing the writings of Raghragh Charley (Société des Océanistes, 2018).

Mari Rethelyi is an Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. She received her PhD in Jewish Studies at the University of

Chicago in 2009. Her work examines Jewish race theories, the formation of Jewish identity in the modern period, and the effect of modern ideologies of nationalism upon the writing of history in Central European Judaism. Her research interest also includes Jewish gender studies and Modern Jewish literature and thought.

Penelope Schoeffel is an Associate Professor of Development Studies at the Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa. She is the author and co-author of a number of published articles and technical reports, and her recent research has considered the cultural factors at play in the lack of sporting or athletic activities for girls in Samoa's villages and secondary colleges.

Harriet Winn is a graduate of the University of Auckland, where she received a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Theological and Religious Studies and History. She is particularly interested in de-colonial studies and religious history, specifically, the role that gender has played within major religious events such as the Protestant Reformation. She is passionate about social justice and has been a student ambassador for the Thursdays in Black student movement to end campus sexual violence since its relaunch in 2016, serving as its chairperson in 2017.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version
<i>b.Abod. Zar.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>'Abodah Zarah</i>
<i>b.Ber</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Berakot</i>
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> (Peabody: Henrickson Publishers, 2008)
<i>b.'Erub.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>'Erubin</i>
<i>b.Git.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Gittin</i>
<i>b.Kallah</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Kallah</i>
<i>b.Ketub.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Ketubbot</i>
<i>b.Kidd.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Kiddushin</i>
<i>b.Ned</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Nedarim</i>
<i>b.Nid.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Niddah</i>
<i>b.Sanh</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>b.Shabb.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Shabbat</i>
<i>b.Sot.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Sotah</i>
<i>b.Yebam</i>	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Yebamot</i>
<i>Hilchot Ishut</i>	Moses Maimonides, <i>Mishneh Torah</i> , division of <i>Nashim</i> , section <i>Hilchot Ishut</i>
KJV	King James Version
LXX	The Greek Septuagint
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>Sh. Ar. OH</i>	<i>Shulḥan Arukh</i> , section <i>Orat Haim</i>
<i>y.Sot.</i>	Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate <i>Sotah</i>



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, and Katie B. Edwards

Gender violence, rape culture, and religion—how do we even begin to make sense of the complex intersections that exist between these phenomena? Observe the following.

In 2013, the chairman of the Samoan Council of Churches publicly blamed increased rates of reported rape in Samoan society on the erosion of Christian values; he also suggested that women (and girls) should fight their attackers physically, otherwise their consent could be implied (*Samoa Observer* 2013). Three years earlier, a United Nations Population Fund report (2010) emphasized the vital role that Pacific Island churches play in providing education and resources to tackle the causes and prevention of gender violence.

Since 2014, there have been countless reports about the abduction and rape of hundreds of Yazidi women and girls from Northern Iraq by members of Islamic State (Callimachi 2015). Many of these women and

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girls are sold into sex slavery, where they are raped repeatedly by their “owners,” some of whom insist that this behaviour is acceptable to (or even sanctioned by) Islamic texts and traditions (ibid.). Meanwhile, some survivors of wartime rape carried out during the 1994 civil war in Rwanda testify that their Christian faith communities have offered them life-saving sanctuary and healing in the aftermath of their assault, while others are confronted with only stigma and hostility from the Christian churches to which they belong (Mukamana and Collins 2006).

During the 1980s, the World Council of Churches initiated a campaign called Thursdays in Black to tackle the ongoing crisis of wartime rape, gender injustice, and gender violence. In 2016, the campaign was relaunched in universities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand¹ as a grass-roots student movement working to end campus rape. The revival of this movement in Aotearoa was incredibly timely, given the New Zealand Human Rights Commission had just issued a report, which highlighted the “pervasive” violence perpetrated against women and children in Aotearoa (2016, p. 36).

In 2014, the US Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution to “oppose steadfastly” any attempts by governing bodies and cultural communities to “validate transgender identity as morally praiseworthy” (Southern Baptist Convention 2014). A few years later, in 2017, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Australia, donated one million dollars to a campaign which was lobbying Australians to vote against same-sex marriage in a government postal survey (McGowan 2017a). Days after this donation was announced, the Anglican Diocese of Perth passed a motion offering a “heartfelt apology” to Australia’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) community, “whom we have hurt by words and behaviour that have not displayed the love of God” (McGowan 2017b). Expressing a need to atone for the symbolic violence of homophobia and transphobia that has marked the church’s history, the motion urged Anglicans to “demonstrate our repentance in changed attitudes and conduct” (ibid.).

News reports and events such as these testify to the multifaceted and complex relationships that exist between religion and gender violence, including the subjective violence of rape and domestic abuse, the symbolic violence of misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic intolerance, and the structural violence of cisheteropatriarchal power structures.² These events also highlight the significant roles that religious texts, traditions, practices, and belief systems can play in both interrogating *and* perpetuat-

ing a range of myths and misperceptions that lie at the heart of rape cultures—cultures that conceptualize gender violence as an “inevitable” or even profitable outcome of normative gender roles and relationships. These myths articulate a powerful cultural acceptance of slut shaming and victim blame, female sexualization and objectification, “naturally” aggressive (cishetero)masculinity, and victims who are “damaged goods”; together, such myths interweave to create environments in which various types of violence against people of all genders can continue unchallenged or even flourish. And thus religions—existing as they do within these rape cultures—inevitably confront and engage with this violence in myriad different ways, exerting a powerful influence on people’s understanding of gender relationships and shaping their responses to gender and gender violence within their own sociocultural contexts.

The chapters in this volume therefore engage with these issues, each contributor considering some of the ways that religions intersect with contemporary cultural discourses of gender, sexuality, gender violence, and rape culture. These intersections are particularly potent, given the authority that religious texts and teachings can have on determining their adherents’ attitudes towards sex and gender, which in turn direct them to either challenge, confirm, query, or redefine rape myths and gender violence narratives. Unique to this volume, our contributors explore such intersections from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, theology, biblical studies, gender and queer studies, politics, modern history, art history, development studies, film and media studies, linguistics, religious studies, and English literature. Together, these interdisciplinary approaches resist the tendency to oversimplify the complexity of the connections between religion, gender violence, and rape culture; rather, they offer readers a multi-vocal and multi-perspectival view of this crucial subject.

The volume does not claim to be exhaustive in its analysis of this topic; we are acutely aware that a number of important issues have not been addressed within the following chapters, including religious discourses around male rape, Western conceptions of gender violence in Islam, and the complicity of Hindu traditions and teachings in India’s pandemic rates of gender violence. Related to this, we acknowledge that the majority of our chapters focus predominantly on Jewish or (especially) Christian traditions. None of these features of the volume were intentional—the topics covered in the following chapters are indicative of the dominant preoccupations of current research into gender violence and religion. And, although we did seek contributors who could engage with a more diverse

range of issues, there were times when we simply could not find anyone willing (or able) to address these perspectives. Nevertheless, we hope that the volume will offer readers the inspiration to begin or continue their *own* research within these neglected subject areas, thereby widening conversations around the devastating effects of rape culture and gender violence in communities the world over.

To begin this interdisciplinary exploration of gender violence, rape culture, and religion, the first three chapters of the volume invite us to turn our eyes southward to consider the crisis of gender violence enveloping Oceania. In Chap. 2, Penelope Schoeffel, Ramona Boodoosingh, and Galumalemana Steven Percival explore understandings of gender roles and gender violence within rural Samoan villages, applying approaches from development studies and filmmaking as their theoretical key. Using Percival's 2015 documentary on gender violence in Samoa ("Raise the Sennit Sail") as the starting point for their discussion, they consider the complicity of Samoan cultural and Christian traditions in perpetuating gender inequalities, gender violence, and rape-supportive social discourses. Samoa is a country whose cultural identity has become irrevocably intertwined with Western ideations of Christian piety, brought over to these islands during the colonial period. Schoeffel, Boodoosingh, and Percival discuss the implications of this, drawing on theories of performativity to consider the cultural functions of discourses that render gender violence an accepted part of Samoan culture.

Staying within the Pacific Islands, in Chap. 3, anthropologist Jean Louis Rallu explores the traditional, pre-contact relations between women and men in Melanesia, tracing the changes to sexual and social mores that took place within traditional Melanesian societies under Christianization and colonization. Rallu then considers some of the recent challenges faced by nongovernmental and intergovernmental International Organizations in the Pacific Islands in their attempts to confront gender inequality and gender violence in this region. Evaluating the multiple effects of tradition, Christianization, and colonization on gender relationships and gender violence, he inquires how these have impacted later dialogue and cooperation between International Organizations and Pacific Island communities.

Chapter 4 travels from Pacifica to nearby Aotearoa New Zealand, where feminist historian Harriet Winn traces the origins and development of Thursdays in Black, a grassroots activist movement to combat global gender violence, developed by the World Council of Churches in the

1980s. Revived in 2015 as a student-led group campaigning against campus rape, Thursdays in Black NZ has become a timely response to the urgent crisis of sexual violence within Aotearoa. Winn outlines the religious origins of this movement, before exploring its attempts to combat sexual violence within Aotearoa in contextually specific ways, particularly with regard to its commitment to feminist praxis and its adoption of *mātauranga* Māori—Māori knowledge—as a core part of the movement’s identity and philosophy.

In Chap. 5, Breann Fallon shifts our attention over to the African continent, where she explores the critical issue of genocidal wartime rape from a religious studies perspective. Focusing on the 1994 civil war in Rwanda, she discusses the impact that rape during conflict can have on survivors’ personal faith and relationships with their religious communities. Drawing on first-hand accounts from survivors of sexual violence during this conflict, she discerns the immediate and long-term impacts such violence has had on the faith of survivors, concluding that personal faith should be a key consideration for care providers in structuring wartime rape victims’ recovery and rehabilitation.

In Chap. 6, Valerie Hobbs uses theories from applied linguistics to study the gendered discourses in online Christian sermons on divorce, which either compromise or espouse efforts to combat violence against women. Through close linguistic analysis of some of these sermons, she notes that a significant number of pastors use euphemism to talk about violence, frequently identify divorce (rather than spousal abuse) as an act of violence, and appeal to biblical or religious authority to justify their insistence that women remain in violent relationships. Hobbs argues that these findings indicate a need for members of religious communities to examine closely the ways that their own discourses promote rape culture.

Chapter 7 continues to focus on the symbolic violence of language, as Caroline Blyth and Prior McRae discuss the transphobic violence that appears to be inherent within some conservative Christian discourses. Written as a dialogue between the two authors, Blyth and McRae look at a number of conservative Christian responses to the “transgender debate” which have proliferated in recent years. Their discussion explores the violence rooted within these responses, including both outright transphobic intolerance and expressions of “benign concern” for the sinful status of transgender people. They suggest that these discourses act as a constant source of transphobic violence, in that they problematize or even negate the validity of trans identities, thereby attempting to erase trans people from families, churches, and communities.

In Chap. 8, David Hare continues this discussion of Christian responses to queer identities, drawing on both theological anthropology and political theories of authenticity and legitimacy to explore the violence of homophobic and heteronormative rhetoric within the church. He argues that a person's sense of their authenticity and identity are vital features of their humanity; when church communities draw their ideations of political morality and theology from discourses intolerant of LGBT identities, they essentially delegitimize the authenticity of LGBT people. Hare thus calls on churches to begin "queering" their own heteronormative theologies and traditions, breaking down boundaries that marginalize and delegitimize LGBT Christian identities, thus allowing the church community to acquire the precious gift of validating "others" as authentic human beings.

Chapter 9 turns our attention more explicitly to religious texts, as biblical scholar Caroline Blyth teams up with art historian Jane Davidson-Ladd to examine the biblical law of Deut. 21:10–14 (the "law of the captive war bride"), which outlines the legal means by which an Israelite soldier can abduct and marry a female war captive. Reading the text alongside recent reports about the abduction and rape of Yazidi women by members of Islamic State, Blyth and Davidson-Ladd consider whether this biblical text gives voice to a "theology of rape," which grants divine sanction to sexual violence during warfare. They also consider the biblical text in light of a painting by New Zealand-based artist Louis John Steele, titled *Spoils to the Victor*, tracing the intersecting oppressions at play within both the image and the biblical law, including gendered and ethnic identities, colonial conquest, and the vulnerability of the foreign female body. They conclude that this biblical law may indeed endorse a "theology of rape," the ideological foundations of which continue to exert a dangerous and powerful influence within contemporary contexts of war.

Staying with our textual focus, Chap. 10 considers another biblical text that evokes images of gender violence during warfare: Jer. 6:1–8. Drawing upon the ecological principles of suspicion and retrieval, Emily Colgan performs a close reading of this text, focusing on the sexual codifications present therein from the perspective of the Land personified as a woman. She then supplements this reading with an intertextual exploration of the role that texts such as Jer. 6:1–8 play in the discursive formation of individuals and society in her native land of Aotearoa New Zealand. Using a literary critical lens to explore the poem "Not by wind ravaged" by Māori poet Hone Tuwhare, she evaluates the degree to which the violent sexual logic of Jer. 6:1–8 continues to shape the social imaginary of this country.

In our final chapter, Mari Rethelyi continues with a textual focus in order to explore attitudes towards marital rape expressed in Jewish rabbinic traditions, particularly the Babylonian Talmud. She considers first the broader rabbinic teachings on sexuality within marriage before mapping out rabbinic understandings of and responses to marital sexual violence. She suggests that, while the laws do offer women some forms of protection from spousal rape, they nevertheless remain rooted within patriarchal discourses, which sustain certain gender inequalities while also evoking rape-supportive understandings of sexuality and gender relations.

And thus concludes our volume; we hope you find the discussions fruitful and thought-provoking, inspiring you to engage in your own interdisciplinary conversations around the complex, timely, and urgent issue of gender violence, rape culture, and religion.

NOTES

1. Aotearoa is the most widely used Māori name for New Zealand, and often precedes its English counterpart when the country is written or spoken about, or may be used on its own.
2. We refer here to Slavoj Žižek's categories of objective and subjective violence (2008). Subjective violence relates to the physical violence of crime and terror; objective violence includes the symbolic violence of hate speech and discrimination and the structural (or systemic) violence inherent within political and economic systems of power.

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