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Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality: Ethnographic Approaches

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Kay and by Margaret Poloma and Matthew T. Lee, proposes that the exercise of spiritual gifts largely accounts for the growth of Pentecostalism (an argument cognate with Martin Lindhardt's recent analysis of Pentecostal ritual). While Kay's essay is a discursive reflection drawing on personal observation, Poloma and Lee use research data, much of it their own, to document the role of prophecy and prophetic prayer as an engine of Pentecostal growth. The book ends with a Conclusion by Miller recapitulating the arguments in each section.

There is surprisingly little in this book that is not already familiar to scholars of Pentecostalism, despite the new research. Its most original feature is the demographic data in the appendices, but while that underscores the preponderant bulk of the charismatic constituency within the 'renewalist' category, the substantive chapters tend to focus on Pentecostalism in its institutionally distinctive form. Perhaps a section on what distinguishes Pentecostal from charismatic constituencies might have been illuminating.

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Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality: Ethnographic Approaches

ANNA FEDELE & KIM E. KNIBBE, eds., 2013

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Anna Fedele and Kim Knibbe's timely edited book focuses on the intersection between gender and power in contemporary spiritualities within Europe and the Americas. The themes explored in this book—while familiar to those interested in gender, religion, and spirituality—offers valuable and constructive analyses. Emerging from the eleventh bi-annual conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (2010), the volume brings together an array of ethnographic studies, for example, Monica Cornejo's research on Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Spain, Viola Teisenhoffer's on Umbanda practitioners in Paris, and Ehler Voss's on mediumistic healers in Germany. Key questions that frame the volume are "what it means to be spiritual, can spirituality be distinguished from religion? Are the practices developed by contemporary spiritualities as empowering as advocates state? And what role do gender and power have in contemporary spiritual groups claiming to be gender-equal and nonhierarchical?" (2). The contributing authors engage with these questions, demonstrating that gender and power in the various researched spiritual groups form a complex dynamic.

In her chapter, Åsa Trulsson examines how Goddess-oriented groups who want to distinguish themselves from patriarchal mainstream religions still have

to negotiate power and authority, which shape their spiritual practices and identities. Eugenia Roussou reveals how Greek women “individualize their religiosity by adopting and amalgamating Orthodox Christianity and alternative forms of spirituality” (47). She shows how, instead of providing a critique of and positioning religion as opposite to spirituality, they find ways to accommodate both. Other chapters investigate the impact of gender and power on leadership within spiritual groups. Rachel Werczberger, who conducted ethnographic research within a Jewish spiritual renewal community, studied the juxtaposition of “charismatic leadership, the authority of the Jewish tradition and morality and New Age spirituality’s creed, which emphasizes the authority of the self” (127). She conveys how spiritual communities are still structured by forms of power external to them, such as that of the wider Jewish tradition in Israel, even when they generate their own forms of authority. Victoria Hegner looks at how public spaces within the city both shape and are contested through rituals of witchcraft. Similar to other authors she investigates the fine balance between inner and outer authorities.

Throughout the collection, the authors demonstrate the tensions that arise between meanings of religion and spirituality, individual and group subjectivities, passivity and agency, equality and inequality, and power and empowerment. Physical and spiritual motherhood are also focal and central to the identities and empowerment of women who are part of the Brahma Kumaris in Portugal; Inês Lourenço introduces us to them. Finally, Ethan Sharp explores how successful recovery from drug addiction requires the integration into a form of “male sociability that reinforces hegemonic masculinity” (197). Striking about Sharp’s chapter is that, unlike the other chapters that mainly focus on women’s experiences, his focus is on men’s interactions with spirituality. Thus, if there is criticism about the book, it is that more chapters on men’s experiences of spirituality and spiritual groups would have strengthened the collection. Perhaps this shows that more ethnographic research needs to be conducted in this area (see the *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* as one resource).

Finally, a fundamental and positive feature of the book is the introductory chapter written by Fedele and Knibbe. They explain recent debates, define their terms, and skilfully lay out the complexities of the title. Written by scholars at varying stages of their careers, this book offers an accessible and engaging collection of essays that foreground the interplay between gender, power, spirituality, and social context. I recommend this book to those interested in current developments and research in the field of spirituality.

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