BOOK REVIEW: Sivasubramaniam, M., & Hayhoe, R. (Eds.) (2018). *Religion and Education: Comparative and International Perspectives.* Oxford: Symposium Books. 388 pp. ISBN: 978-1-910744-01-7.

Annett Graefe-Geusch[1]
New York University, USA

In their edited volume, *Religion and Education: Comparative and International Perspectives*, Sivasubramaniam and Hayhoe present a collection of research and theoretical discussions that exemplify the importance of religious education, religious organizations and institutions for research in comparative and international education and policy discussions. The topic, they argue, has been muted and absent from discussions despite the world wide rise of religious tensions, fear of Islamic terrorism, and religiously motivated violence and their potential threat to national peace and security. Despite the long involvement of religious and faith communities in schooling, stakeholders have yet to recognize and acknowledge the place of religion and faith in policy decisions. Exemplarily, the editors' point out the absence of any mention of religion, religious education or faith based civil society actors in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

To emphasize the importance of religion for all areas related to education globally, the editors present 17 chapters grouped into three sections: (1) Internationalising/ Globalising Religious Values, (2) Curriculum, Pedagogy and School Leadership, and (3) Religion in Policy Processes and Conflict Resolution. What all the contributions to this volume share is the conviction that religion and religious education may be important for students' well-being and thus is a key issue in realizing global education agendas and contributing to social development. With that in mind, each section contributes unique data, perspectives, and disciplinary approaches to this discussion which covers various regions of the world and multiple religious and faith groups. Religious teachings and groups such as Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Judaism are explored from different perspectives and the viewpoints of various actors. Although it is of course not possible to cover all possible faith groups and areas, the volume has a strong regional focus on Asia and the complete absence of South American cases.

Section one focuses on the interaction between global and local agendas in the relationship between education and religion. Each of the six chapters presents a group of actors that significantly shape - or have the potential to do so - the positive impact religion can have on education. Most chapters (except Seeberg, Luo, & Na; Hayhoe) approach this theme from a policy perspective. Every contributor in this first section advocates for

[1] *Correspondence*: New York University, Department of Applied Statistics, Social Sciences, and Humanities 246 Green Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10003; ag3728@nyu.edu.

including religion, religious education, and faith communities and organizations into the political process so as to shape and improve policy decisions related to all areas of education.

In the first chapter, Marshall argues for the importance of seeing religious institutions as "significant players for achieving global education goals" (p. 32). The examination presents six areas where religious actors may be of crucial importance: (1) access and integration, (2) refugees and displaced persons; (3) pluralism and curriculum, (4) citizenship and social cohesion, (5) the training of future religious leaders, and (6) religious leader advocacy and engagement in policy debates. The chapter discusses potential ways in which engaging with religion and religious actors at a policy level can contribute to global coherence and an embrace of diversity while also acknowledging the potential of religious actors to subvert global education goals. The discussion presents a broad overview of perspectives and faith groups and their various current and possible involvements in furthering education across different settings and situations.

Chapter Two looks at the Confucius Institutes' (CI) and Classrooms (CC) partnerships in Africa. Specifically, CIs and CCs are present in 36 African nations such as Angola, Egypt, Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda and Togo to name just a few with a total of 46 CIs and 23 CCs. The author shows how, based on the ethics underlying the teachings of the CI, its core values and goals may contribute to more "inclusive and communicative" societies based on partnerships. Li concludes her argument by pointing out the specific values that may make the educational approach of the CI and its partnership with African nations a valuable model for educational development as intended by the SDG.

Hwang's chapter on Christian universities in South Korea and Canada evaluates the process of internationalizing these organizations and the specific Christian values that underlie these efforts. Hwang presents Christian higher education as an alternative to its secular counterpart. She argues that the shared Christian values underlying internationalization advance both efforts significantly and are worthy of further examination. Her case studies show that, although the national contexts may differ, the values inherent to the universities' internationalization processes are similar and deeply grounded in Christian beliefs.

In chapter four, Niyozov presents a discussion of the contribution of Islamic education to nation-building efforts of post-Soviet Tajikistan. After a brief review of Islamic education and its relationship to the Soviet regime, Niyozov discusses the problematic political revival of Islam in Tajikistan and its clash with pro-communist and secular forces. The contested nature of Islam after the civil war led to a multitude of formal and informal educational initiatives within Tajikistan, all closely monitored by the state. To remedy the contest between state sponsored nationalism and a focus on ethnic identity based on Islam, Niyozov proposes a "constructive-critical approach" to religious education that may further global education goals across Central Asia (p. 105).

Seeberg, Luo, and Na approach the importance of religion for global educational goals from an anthropological perspective, examining the lives of Catholic, young, rural, female migrant workers in Western China. The chapter explores how the lived religious values within this vulnerable group shields these young women from potential dangers such as sexually risky behavior, inappropriate intimate relationships, or involvement in prostitution, while also providing valuable occupational opportunities. The social and economic support of their faith community as well as its moral teachings facilitated a sense of agency, the ability to act on aspirations and further advancement of their own capabilities as young women. The authors conclude their discussion by arguing that an engagement with religious values

especially in contexts where religion is suppressed by the state may hold great potential for advancing SDGs.

In the final chapter of section one, Hayhoe presents a historical analysis of three transformative experiences of inter-religious interaction. Taking Christianity as her focal point, the author describes the positive historic interaction between Christians, Buddhists, Daoists and Confucian adherents in order to highlight "the learning across religions and civilizations at a deep level, even under conditions of geo-political threat and imbalance" (p. 146). Hayhoe argues that these examples of historical encounters may function as learning opportunities for the analysis and interaction with present challenges connected to religion globally.

Section Two concentrates on policy implementation and enactments in public and faith-based schools. With two exceptions (Katz; Herzog & Adams), most of the chapters examine educational experiences and practices in schools in various country contexts. Methodologically, most chapters examine qualitative data, showing what impact religious education and faith may have at the individual school level. The authors examine data that show how religious education may foster the integration of religious minority groups, increase access for disadvantaged populations, and improve knowledge and understanding of the world in various groups.

In the first chapter of Section Two, Wong examines the implementation of a single religion-based curriculum in the multi-religious setting of Hong Kong. Her qualitative fieldwork took place in four randomly selected religious schools representing four major religious groups (Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Taoism) in Hong Kong. She found that the schools' religious curriculum served two main purposes: (1) teaching religion from a mono-religious standpoint, and (2) teaching morals and values. She concludes that this shows the significant influence religious organizations have in Hong Kong, given the lack of an official government-sponsored religion curriculum.

The second chapter in the section investigates the connection of state schooling and religious education in China using rural Muslim Hui students as case study. Wu argues that the dichotomy between state schooling representing modernity and religious lives representing backwardness and tradition is breaking down. In its place, an "integrative education experience for Muslim Hui" (p. 180) shows how the two can complement each other.

Niyom, Ayudhaya, Rachatatanun, and Vokes discuss the Buddhist school-based curriculum at three case study schools in Thailand from a practitioners' perspective. They show how the incorporation of Buddhist religious principles into all aspects of schooling affords students, teachers, and parents a holistic learning experience. They conclude that the practices employed in their case study schools can be transferred and would contribute to enhance learners "personal understanding, love, and compassion" (p. 200) and thus contribute to peaceful inter-faith dialog.

The fourth chapter of this section examines the modernization of Islamic school systems in Bangladesh and Senegal. Herzog and Adams describe the place of Islamic religious education within both nations' state-run school systems, using teaching case studies as their primary data source. Within a context of increasing mistrust towards Islamic education and global and national security threats, the authors argue for the potential that addressing Islamic education at the policy level may have as Islamic religious schools fill "critical gaps and reach key populations" (p. 221). That is, they provide much needed education to the very poor, religious knowledge and values education valued by parents in these countries and may be the only option of schooling for girls in societies that limits female mobility.

Sivasubramaniam and Sider explore faith-based low-fee private schools in Kenya and Haiti arguing that these types of schools were established based on faith but "function with a curious paradox of philanthropy and enterprise" (p. 225). Based on multiple qualitative and quantitative data sources from both contexts, they conclude that a religious motivation for operating these schools is an important driver for entrepreneurs to provide education to under-served populations. The authors argue that this type of entrepreneurial activity may provide a different faith-based avenue for creating access to education outside the public-private debate.

The last chapter in this section examines religious education in the Israeli public school system based on a historic analysis of its development. Katz shows that the state produced a system of "two official Jewish state education sectors" and "two unofficial private sub-sectors" (p. 264) as well as an Arab education system within a context of serious religious divisions between Muslims, Christians and Jews, as well as religious and secular Jews. Katz argues that the organization of the system and the autonomies it affords has prevented the Israeli education system from fully realizing the unification it promises.

Section three focuses on the role of the state and the often contentious and polarizing discourses surrounding the negotiation of religious education, that is, who and what should be part of a religious education (RE) curriculum, who makes curriculum decisions, whether RE should be part of public education at all, and if it is to be mandatory. All of the chapters in this section highlight the role states and political elites may play in the use of religion, for better or worse. Within the context of growing politicization of religion, increasing international conflict and refugee and migrant streams, the authors argue it is important to determine the kind of religious education implemented and what and whose purposes it may serve.

In the first chapter of this section, Barnes examines religious education in Northern Ireland in light of the violent conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the middle of the 20th century. After a review of the history of religion and education in Northern Ireland and an examination of the religious education curriculum, he finds that Christianity has not challenged religious intolerance, hate, and sectarianism, despite its potential to do so. In essence he finds that there is no multi-faith religious education, as practiced by the English and the Welsh, in Northern Ireland. Barnes cautions that religious education is always context-specific and thus there are no universal solutions in the face of (violent) religious conflicts.

Kidwai analyzes the effects and relationships produced by the Indian government's efforts to mainstream faith community-based religious education. He argues, based on co-optation theory, that madrassa leaders use the Indian government's efforts to gain control in madrassa schools as an area of active resistance. He further shows that ill-equipped "schools-faking-as-madrassas" threaten to subsume some of the Muslim student population and thus create an impetus for internal reform in the faith community schools. To conclude, Kidwai uses the co-optation process carried out by the Indian government to caution against the assumption that leaving religion out of the development and modernization dialog may result in unexpected and sometimes negative consequences.

The third chapter of this section engages in a historical analysis of de-secularization in Russia. Lisovskaya outlines the process in which religious education found its way back into Russian schools after it was banished from the curriculum during the Soviet era. This process, she argues, involves deliberate co-option by political forces in order to secure greater political power and influence. However, Lisovskaya argues, this is contested and ultimately inconsistent because of "apathetic public support and participation" (p. 311). Ultimately, the

curriculum implemented in schools follows a neo-imperial agenda rather than promoting intercultural peace and inclusion. Thus, Lisovskaya argues, religious education, its introduction into schools, and the aims it pursues are highly context-dependent.

Ghosh and Chan present a theoretical discussion of the role religious education can play in countering religious extremism. In contrast to hard power alternatives such as surveillance, policing, and criminalization in counter-terrorism measures, they argue religious education may function as a soft power alternative. This avenue has so far been ignored and underutilized by Western powers while, in contrast, ISIS finds religious education to be highly effective as a machinery to indoctrinate followers. Ghosh and Chan argue for a form of religious education that promotes "critical thinking, ethical citizenship, and respect for diversity" (p. 347). In order to be effective as a form of soft power, religious education must be inclusive, learn from religions that promote critical thinking, and foster the autonomy of students to critically question personal beliefs and those of others.

In the last chapter of this section, Collet and Bang examine public school policies on religion in a hierarchical cluster analysis across 20 states with subsequent ANOVA and post hoc tests to determine statistical significance within and between clusters. Underlying their analysis is the assumption that a higher level of accommodation for religion within public schools benefits religious minority and immigrant students. Their cluster analysis shows five different groups: "high religious freedom providers", "moderate religious freedom providers", "Christian-focused religious freedom providers", "committed secularists," and, finally, "sensitive religious freedom providers" (p. 365). They conclude that, given the nature of international migration and refugee streams, the commonalities and differences identified by the cluster analysis may provide important areas for policy recommendations that may ultimately improve the standing of minority and migrant religions in the analyzed countries.

Although the volume makes a cogent, multi-faceted case for the inclusion of religion into conversations about advancing global education goals, it is missing three vital lines of discussion that may have strengthened the text: (1) critical engagement of the potential dangers of religious education in conflict settings that goes beyond an analysis of policy decisions; (2) a discussion of secularism as a prominent policy alternative to religion; and (3) a concrete look at the implementation of religion in the curriculum by teachers in public or state schools. I will discuss all three of these points below with an explanation of why I believe they are vital to make a case for the inclusion of religion in education policy agendas and research. However, due to space constraints, the arguments should not be seen as comprehensive, but suggestions for additional avenues of thought and inquiry.

My first point touches on the importance of religion as a motivating factor for violence, hate, and militancy in non-Western areas, thus highlighting potential dangers involved in including religion in policy agendas. A brief look at the Council on Foreign Relations (2018) *Global Conflict Tracker* shows that almost all conflicts mapped are outside of Europe and North America, with the exception of the Ukraine. While some are motivated by territorial disputes (e.g. the conflict in the East China Sea), a significant number are connected to religion, religious identity, and religious practices: the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, the war in Afghanistan, Islamist militancy in Pakistan, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and Al-Shabab in Somalia, to name just a few. While there are many theoretical discussions or words of caution on the potential shortcomings of religious education when used to indoctrinate, proselytize, or as a form of power and population control mechanism (cf. Marshall, 2018; Niyozov, 2018; Herzog & Adams, 2018; Barnes, 2018; Kidwai, 2018; Lisovskaya, 2018; Ghosh & Chan, 2018 – all in this volume), none of the chapters chosen for this volume offer an in-depth analysis and critique of a case where religion in a

conflict setting is used in a potentially harmful way that goes beyond the analysis of policy decisions and stakeholders. Although Barnes' study cautions of the potential dangers a sectarian view on religion in education may have, evidence on how this may influence student attitudes is lacking.

As ample research has shown, religion - as any identity-based set of values - may be used to create hate, militancy, and violence (e.g. Burde [2014] for a discussion of US-funded textbooks in Afghanistan). The effects of such curricula used to indoctrinate or create division are understudied. In times when religion is often met with mistrust and construed as a source of violence, a volume framed as a request to consider religion as vital part of global and national education goals needs to engage directly with negative examples. An examination and critique of curricula involving religion, its effects on student outcomes, and lessons learned is vital to advance serious consideration of religion and religious literacy as a force for good in education.

Secondly, the potential of religion as a source for social division and violence and negative attitudes towards minority populations (cf. Pew Research Center, 2011) has motivated some policymakers and researchers to promote secularism and neutrality as an alternative to religion in Western societies (e.g. Neutrality law in Berlin, Germany; Joppke, 2007). As Western nations and their ideological biases are often deeply involved in aid and development agendas elsewhere in the world, confronting their biases is crucial (cf. e.g. Moland [2015] for an empirical discussion of Western biases and their effect). If we are to advance discussions of religion and religious education at a national and global policy level, we need to make an argument that secularism is by no means the better paradigm for education to promote inclusion, peace, and inter-faith dialog. Secularism, with its deep roots in European enlightenment philosophy, constructs public schools in liberal democratic societies as places where the religiously and ideologically neutral state is represented by teachers who serve its denizens. Some scholars, however, argue that both secularism and liberalism have deep roots in Christian ideologies (Casanova, 1994; Taylor, 2007) and are thus not neutral. Consequently, some theorize that the institutional realities of European societies pre-condition the negative response to Islam and other non-Christian religions (Favell, 1998a; 1998b). It is thus highly questionable whether education based on the principle of secularism can in fact accommodate religious diversity. A critical engagement with this line of theory and research in the volume may also have strengthened the case for religion as a way to achieve peaceful coexistence and better immigrant accommodation in societies (as proposed by Collet and Bang in the last chapter of the volume).

Finally, taking a cue from Barnes, a strong argument for the inclusion of religion in national and global policy agendas also needs to consider the implementation of religious education in public schools. As Barnes points out, "prejudice and intolerance are attitudes and although attitudes may be influenced by education and increased knowledge, they are much more liable to be challenged and changed by personal experience and personal encounters, and by personal example" (p. 284). That is to say, teachers, their views and attitudes towards religion, and how they implement state-mandated directives may be crucial in promoting inclusion, social cohesion and peace globally. While many authors in this edited volume propose a certain kind of religious education in classrooms - one that is based on neutrality, mutual understanding, and inter-faith dialog (cf. Marshall, 2018; Li, 2018; Niyozov, 2018; Niyom, Ayudhaya, Rachatatanun, & Vokes, 2018; Barnes, 2018; Ghosh & Chan, 2018 – all in this volume), examining what a classroom implementation of such a religious literacy curriculum may look like is absent. Although Wong examines effects curriculum implementation may have, she focuses her attention on faith-based private schools that do

not have to adhere to state regulations and curricular mandates. Similarly, Niyom, Ayudhaya, Rachatatanun, and Vokes discuss their experience with the integration of religion into faith-based schools. Yet, in many national contexts, the vast majority of students attend state run, public schools, or schools that operate based on state controlled curricular (cf. OECD, 2012). This makes the voices of public school teachers, the agents tasked with implementing curricula, fundamental for any consideration of religion and religious education.

We know from previous research, that teachers may realize their own agendas and follow certain group interests within the constraints of the school as an organization (Bidwell, Frank, and Quiroz, 1997; Bidwell, 2006). In addition, teachers' attitudes and taken-for-granted beliefs may even hinder the implementation of new knowledge and policy directives (Johnson, 1990; Little, 1990; Talbert and McLaughlin, 1994; Bidwell and Yasumoto, 1999). Education policy directives and theoretical discussions of what good religious education may look like is thus not enough to prove that religion is indeed a vital force to advance global education goals like the SDGs. Research agendas and discussions also need to consider the school-level implementation mechanisms and analyze what context-specific factors may promote a productive engagement with religion, religious identity, and religious literacy.

Despite the above mentioned three points of critique, the edited volume by Sivasubramaniam and Hayhoe presents an important contribution to research in comparative and international education. The book advances the importance of a vital area of research that often does not get enough attention in policy discussions as well as education scholars' inquiries. It brings together different research agendas, regional orientations, as well as a great diversity of research subject ranging from supra-national actors to local schools and individual student groups. The topical organization presents vital points that clearly articulate the importance of ending the silence on religion in global education policy agendas. The book could have been strengthened by a critical engagement with the potential dangers of religious education in a non-Western context, a discussion of secularism as the prominent policy alternative to religion, and a concrete look at the implementation of religious curricular by teachers in public or state schools, Nevertheless, the book is well worth reading for those engaged in international and comparative research of education, practitioners looking for directives on how to include religion into their curricula, and policymakers engaged in creating inclusive pluralistic societies.

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About the Author

Annett Graefe-Geusch is a PhD candidate in International Education at NYU and is currently writing her dissertation on diversity management in Berlin's ethics instruction focusing specifically on the treatment of minority religions from a teachers' perspective. Her interests include the intersections of migration, diversity and education, and school change driven by demographic variation.