

laws relating to homosexuals in the name of religion. It is a thought-provoking contribution to scholarly debates on the accommodation of religion by law in matters of sexual orientation.

MATTHEW GIBSON

University of Liverpool

doi:10.1017/S0956618X15000617

The Experiences of Face Veil Wearers in Europe and the Law

Edited by EVA BREMS

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, Cambridge Studies in Law and Society, ix + 321 pp (hardback £65) ISBN: 978-1-107-05830-9

The wearing by Islamic women of head coverings of various types (usually referred to as the hijab) is seldom out of the news. More potentially controversial is the use of the face veil (or niqab), together with the whole-body burka, though the latter is rarely seen in western Europe. Hijabs are now widely worn on British streets, in British workplaces and in most educational establishments. Although there clearly remain issues to be debated generally, for many British readers of this book the wearing of a headscarf as a manifestation of religious belief may no longer generally seem to be such a controversial matter, whatever the tabloid headline-writers may suggest, save when it conflicts with other rules, such as where a school has a strict uniform code which does not allow for head-covering. This is not, however, the subject matter of the book, which deals with the issues raised by the niqab.

On my own daily walk from the station to my office in south London, the sight of a niqab is not unusual. The deliberate covering of the face does, however, generate rather more polarised debate and disagreement than a headscarf. I would be unlikely to see a niqab, for example, on the streets of Paris or Brussels: in April 2011 legislation came into force in France prohibiting the wearing, in spaces open to the public, of 'a garment that has the effect of hiding the face', while similar legislation commenced in Belgium in July 2011. There have been various forms of local bans elsewhere in Europe; within the UK, the UK Independence Party has proposed such a ban, and a private member's bill to ban face-covering in public was discussed in Parliament in the autumn of 2013, although it did not generate any significant political support.

Islamic dress, and the wearing of the veil in particular, has been the subject of much recent academic writing, in this journal and elsewhere. What, then, can this new book, part of the 'Cambridge Studies in Law and Society' series, bring to the debate? Eva Brems (Professor of Human Rights Law at Ghent

University) has identified that the debates and bans on the wearing of the veil have relied upon assumptions rather than facts: she expresses concern that, where bans on the face veil have been imposed, this has not been informed by knowledge of the practices, views and experiences of those who wear the veil. Professor Brems researched the experiences of women who wear a face veil in Belgium, and has teamed up with colleagues who carried out similar studies in France, the Netherlands, the UK and Denmark, each studying relying upon the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews. The book comprises 14 chapters: after Brems's introductory chapter, the next four deal with the European studies into the wearing of the face veil, while the remaining nine address various aspects of the wide-ranging debate. A short review cannot hope to summarise the various contributions from 20 different writers of different academic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Professor Brems plainly wished researchers to present their findings in context and from the angle which they found most relevant. The commentaries comprising Part II are written by existing authorities in the field, but *after* they were presented with the empirical data collected.

Despite the diversity of approach, certain key themes emerge. The large majority of veil-wearers interviewed were born in Europe or had spent most of their lives here, and many were converts to Islam. All interviewees asserted that it was their free choice to wear the veil; the research found that the choice of wearing the veil did not indicate a withdrawal from society. Many interviewees complained of public harassment and abuse, and expressed frustration at misrepresentation of their point of view. These studies do, however, identify some differences between different countries. In the UK, for example, research was commissioned in 2010 by the Open Society Foundations. The work was carried out by Naima Bouteldja, a journalist and documentary film-maker, rather than an academic. Broadly speaking, she found more toleration in the UK, and veil-wearers are more likely to have relatives or friends who wear the niqab and are more likely to be educated and in employment.

The contents of the chapters in Part II cover a range of topics and viewpoints. To give just one example, Professor Maleiha Malik (of Kings College London) considers the deployment of arguments such as gender equality and autonomy in justifying the criminalisation of veils and suggests that

before we can move towards a more reasonable discussion about the face veil in Europe we may need to identify the ways in which the European model of persecution has survived twentieth-century constitutional liberalism and the guarantee of individual human rights. (p 249)

The book does not seek to provide overall conclusions, although the reader might well note that the consensus between the various contributors reveals

an opposition (from various perspectives) to the bans on niqabs which have been imposed, and a criticism of actions taken without adequate understanding of the veil-wearer's perspective. The publishers suggest that the book will 'move the current discussion on face veil bans forward by providing a much-needed insider perspective'. To accuse the book of a lack of balance would therefore be unfair. The title of the book accurately describes its contents, and those contents fill a gap and add, significantly, to the debate over religious manifestation in the public space through wearing the face veil. There is doubtless much more to be written about the subject from differing viewpoints, and much academic and policy debate to be had. Those who read this book, or dip into its individual chapters as source materials, will be better equipped to contribute constructively to that debate.

MARK EMERTON

Employment Judge

doi:10.1017/S0956618X15000629

The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective

Edited by ARI MERMELSTEIN AND SHALOM E HOLTZ

Brill, Leiden, 2014, 308 pp (hardback €115) ISBN: 978-90-04-28163-9

These 13 essays, originally presentations at a Yeshiva University conference in 2012, explore the theme of God's judgment, mainly within Hebrew tradition, but with two essays from a Christian perspective and one relating to Muslim courts. The concept of the divine courtroom is a metaphor, drawn from human experience, and there is exploration throughout the essays of the tension between human and divine justice.

The Introduction perceptively suggests that exploration of God's courtroom amounts to humanity's trial of God, to see whether there is justice with God: a judge is always being judged. Dov Weiss highlights Jeremiah's and Job's references to God himself being on trial; Warren Zev Harvey similarly cites Maimonides and Kant. Meira Kensky explores the early Christian writer Tertullian in reiterating that the judge and the legal process are themselves on trial in any courtroom, although concluding that it is God's judgment that represents absolute justice. She follows this with a careful examination of Tertullian's *Apologeticum*, as he implicitly contrasts God's justice with that of his Roman audience, their sometimes flawed justice and their unwillingness to give Christianity a fair hearing.

Tzvi Abusch starts from the Mesopotamian *Maqlû*'s ceremonial invocation of the fire god to pass judgments, and continues to the replication of stages of