

Call for papers: Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion volume

Co-editors' Details Dr Caroline Blyth (c.blyth@auckland.ac.nz)

Emily Colgan (emcolgan@xtra.co.nz)

Summary We seek chapter proposals for an edited volume of essays that explore the intersections between gender violence, rape culture, and religion.

Backdrop to the volume: when religion and rape culture meet

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. Earlier this year, at a webinar held by the We Will Speak Out coalition, Anglican Church leaders from around the globe stressed the role of the church in contesting rape victim stigma. Three years earlier, a United Nations Population Fund report paid tribute to the work carried out by a number of faith based organizations in the Pacific Islands in their efforts to educate communities about the causes and prevention of gender violence.

Less than a year later, in 2014, the widespread sexual assault of an estimated 1400 children in Rotherham by predominantly British Asian men sparked an extensive and global debate about the role of race and religion in crimes of rape; claims were made that authorities failed to act sooner for fear of being labelled racist or Islamophobic in their identification of the alleged perpetrators. The British press spoke of 'predatory Muslim gangs' who had been inspired by 'Islamic theology' to commit these multiple assaults, while Muslim groups in the area condemned both the abuse and the attempted cover-up by authorities.

Earlier this year, an Australian Catholic priest told his congregation that if murdered Melbourne woman Jill Meagher's faith had been stronger, she would have been 'home in bed' rather than out walking in the street on the night she was brutally raped and killed. Around the same time, at a webinar held by the We Will Speak Out coalition, Anglican Church leaders from around the globe stressed the role of the church in *contesting* rape victim stigma and the need to support these victims, rather than blame them.

In the past few months, there have been countless reports on the use of rape and sexual slavery by Islamic State against hundreds if not thousands of Yazidi women and children. Those women who manage to escape and return home face shame and stigma from their communities because their chastity – a significant part of their cultural and religious identity – is now in question. Male victims of wartime rape have also begun to talk about the ways that their violation has affected all areas of their lives, including their religious lives; one survivor in Uganda expressed his fear of going to church – the one place he believed he could get help – because he felt too 'unclean'.

The volume: aims and objectives

News stories, reports, and events such as these highlight the many complex ways that religions and gender violence encounter each other. They also indicate that religions can play significant roles in both interrogating *and* perpetuating 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 sexualisation and objectification, 'naturally' aggressive masculinity, and victims who are 'damaged goods'; together, these interweave to create environments in which various types of sexualized violence against men, women, and children 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 a myriad of different ways.

The purpose of this volume then, is to consider the ways that religious texts, traditions, practices, and beliefs intersect with contemporary cultural ideologies about gender and sexuality that support rape culture and gender violence discourses. These intersections are particularly potent, given the authority that religious texts and teachings can have on determining their adherents' attitudes towards sex and gender, and the impact that such authority can have within its specific cultural locations to challenge, confirm, query, or redefine rape myths and rape culture narratives.

The aim of the volume is not to advocate one particular understanding of the relationships between religion, gender violence, and rape culture, but rather to recognize that these relationships are complex and multi-vocal. It seeks to present perspectives, which together, offer the reader a glimpse of the complexity of this subject. We also anticipate that it will foster a conversation that inspires on-going responses (both theoretical and practical) and research opportunities, which accentuate and confront some of the devastating effects of rape cultures in communities the world over.

Possible areas of engagement for contributors may include (but are not restricted to):

- Religious teachings and traditions about gender and sexuality – how are these perceived as challenging or confirming rape culture ideologies?
- Religious practices and rituals – how might these reflect or reject rape culture ideologies?
- Attitudes towards gender violence expressed within religious texts – their historical and/or contemporary reception.
- Responses by religious leaders or institutions to debates around rape culture, including media reporting of rape and the critique of religious involvement in rape culture.
- Involvement of religious communities in supporting survivors of gender violence, sexuality education, awareness-raising campaigns (e.g. the NZ White Ribbon campaign), etc.
- The intersection of religion and rape-supportive discourses as understood by members of a particular religious community.
- Interrogating public understandings of particular relationships between religion and rape culture as articulated in the media and popular culture.
- The significance of religion for survivors of gender violence, in terms of, for example, their beliefs, their health, and their healing.
- How popular culture (e.g. film, TV, advertising, visual arts, music, etc) engages with/expresses the intersection of religion and rape culture.

Information for Contributors:

1. If you are keen to contribute to this project, please email Emily and Caroline to express your interest by **30 June, 2015**.
2. Submit your proposal to them (a tentative title and 200-300 word abstract) by **31 July, 2015**.
3. Publication details and style guide will follow once we have confirmed who will be publishing the volume.
4. The final draft of your chapter should be between 5000-8000 words and must be submitted by **1 April 2016**.