

**London Youth, Religion, and Politics: Engagement and Activism from Brixton to Brick Lane**, by Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 234 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-874367-5

Whilst there is a growing body of scholarship that explores young people and their relationship to religion, very little has yet considered the intersections of these two themes with political and civic engagement. In exploring the relations between all three of these areas, as well as the experiences of both Christian *and* Muslim young adults, DeHanas's work thus represents a highly welcome and timely contribution.

In this work, DeHanas explores the experiences and perspectives of second generation 'emerging adults' (those aged 18-25) through fieldwork with two London-based groups: British Bangladeshis (mainly Muslim) in Tower Hamlets; and British Jamaicans (mainly Christian) in Brixton. Drawing on sixty interviews with young adults, participant observation, and interviews with local religious and community leaders, DeHanas considers the kinds of citizens that these second generation young adults are becoming, with especial attention being given to the ways in which religion may structure the patterns of their civic engagement. In particular, DeHanas is interested in whether religion motivates or discourages participation.

The first chapter considers the political literacy of the two groups and their engagement in a range of political activities. This opening chapter presents three main theories or hypotheses of youth political engagement: apathy, whereby 'youth will show low levels of civic identity, low levels of political literacy and interest, and low levels of actual practices of political participation' (27); alienation, with more emphasis being placed upon how young people have become alienated from Britain's political institutions; and atomism, which predicts that youth 'will primarily participate in individual-level activities, while their engagement in collective forms of participation will be minimal' (29). These theories were assessed by DeHanas by asking participants to answer 'true' or 'false' to a short series of factual questions on politics and also whether they had participated in a range of political or civic activities. Political literacy was found to be fairly high among both groups, but

political participation was consistently higher among Bangladeshi than Jamaican young adults, with highly religiously-involved Bangladesh Muslims being the most politically engaged.

Chapters 2 and 3 report the findings of an identity-ranking exercise used to consider how the research participants perceived and conceptualised their identities. Amongst the Bangladeshi Muslims, 'Muslim' ranked very highly in their self-perception, being ranked first in the vast majority of cases. However, this was not a straightforward or monolithic process, DeHanas instead arguing that his participants exhibited an 'elastic orthodoxy', whereby 'they accept the local social consensus on what it is to be a Muslim ... and then work tactically within this framework, stretching it to apply to new contexts and situations' (78). However, Islam was still the central 'orienting identity' for these participants. By contrast, the British Jamaicans exhibited, DeHanas argues, 'situational and hybrid approaches to identity, enabling them to better navigate their diverse environments' (18).

Chapters 4 and 5 explore four places of worship, two mosques and two churches. DeHanas looks first at a more-established mosque and church, then at two newer places of worship. The more-established ones were active in maintaining the 'cultural traditions, practices and values of the first generation' (136), while the newer ones were more attractive and appealing to second generation young people. DeHanas also charts significant differences between the new church and the new mosque, arguing that the new mosque offers young people a 'much more communally oriented self' and the church 'a more individualistic, subjective self' (19). Accordingly, these two places of worship have very different understandings of faith. Thus, whilst the mosque 'begins with an objective reality (Islam) that compels youth to perform particular actions that will, over time, restructure their subjective experience', the church promotes the idea that 'subjective experience grants youth faith in an objective reality (Christianity), which will in turn motivate them to action' (161).

Chapter 6 continues this line of thinking, by investigating two religious mobilisations around socio-political issues, and analysing their different narratives of change. This is a particularly strong and interesting chapter that explores the Seventh Day Adventist LIVE March, which raised awareness

of gun and knife crime, and the Big IFtar, a community event about homelessness held during Ramadan. DeHanas argues that the LIVE event exhibited a form of revival activism, promoting a belief that society will improve as more people come to personal faith in Christ, while the IFtar event was based on a pillared activism, actions for social change being based upon the Five Pillars of Islam, thus being more collective and communal in nature. DeHanas is particularly critical of the limits of revival activism, seeing much more possibility for effectiveness within pillared activism. DeHanas concludes by suggesting that these young people are becoming 'believing citizens', with young Muslims in the East End being the most actively politically engaged.

This is an interesting, well-written and engaging volume with some intriguing key findings. One of DeHanas's main strengths is the way in which the depth of his fieldwork resonates throughout the volume, providing the reader with much richness and detail. DeHanas is also at his best when at his most critical, expressed strongly in the sixth chapter, on political activism. This voice is slightly lacking in the earlier chapters, which would have benefited from a more critical engagement with the different hypotheses of youth political participation, including a deeper acknowledgment of the highly politically-charged nature of this debate, and a stronger sense of DeHanas's own positioning within this. Nonetheless, this volume makes for instructive reading, of benefit to many academic fields. As the sands of youth political engagement seem again to be shifting (for example, as seen in the most recent General Election), this work has the potential to play a significant role in contemporary discussion around these issues.

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