

Edited by  
Joanna de Groot  
and Sue Morgan



# Sex, Gender *and the Sacred*

Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History

WILEY Blackwell



## **Sex, Gender and the Sacred**

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JOANNA DE GROOT  
AND  
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# CONTENTS

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<b>Notes on Contributors</b>	vii
<b>Introduction: Beyond the ‘Religious Turn’? Past, Present and Future Perspectives in Gender History</b>	1
JOANNA DE GROOT AND SUE MORGAN	
Part I: Crossing Cultures and Transnational Exchanges	
1 Witches, Female Priests and Sacred Manoeuvres: (De)Stabilising Gender and Sexuality in a Cuban Religion of African Origin	31
CAROLYN E. WATSON	
2 Liberal Religion and the ‘Woman Question’ between East and West: Perspectives from a Nineteenth-Century Bengali Women’s Journal	51
CLARE MIDGLEY	
3 Indeterminacy in Meaning: Religious Syncretism and Dynastic Historiography in the <i>Shannüren zhuan</i>	67
YUET KEUNG LO	
4 ‘All of Their Customs are Daughters of Their Religion’: Baptists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920s–present	83
KATHLEEN M. McINTYRE	
5 Creating the ‘Problem Hindu’: <i>Sati</i> , Thuggee and Female Infanticide in India, 1800–60	104
DANIEL J. R. GREY	
Part II: Religion, Embodiment and Subjectivity	
6 Engendering Purity and Impurity in Assyriological Studies: A Historiographical Overview	119
ÉRICA COUTO-FERREIRA AND AGNÈS GARCIA-VENTURA	
7 Lamentation Motifs in Medieval Hagiography	135
ANNE E. BAILEY	
8 Architecture of Desire: Mediating the Female Gaze in the Medieval English Anchorhold	150
MICHELLE M. SAUER	

9	The Alluring Beauty of a Leonardesque Ideal: Masculinity and Spirituality in Renaissance Milan MAYA CORRY	170
10	'Deaf to the Word': Gender, Deafness and Protestantism in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland ESME CLEALL	195
Part III: Religion, Gender and Sexuality		
11	The Sexual Shame of the Chaste: 'Abortion Miracles' in Early Medieval Saints' Lives ZUBIN MISTRY	211
12	'Give Me Chastity': Masculinity and Attitudes to Chastity and Celibacy in the Middle Ages PAT CULLUM	225
13	Common Soldiers, Same-Sex Love and Religion in the Early Eighteenth-Century British Army SUSAN GANE	241
14	'Dark Ecstasies': Sex, Mysticism and Psychology in Early Twentieth-Century England JOY DIXON	256
15	Made Flesh? Gender and Doctrine in Religious Violence in Twentieth-Century Spain MARY VINCENT	272
Part IV: Gender, Religion and Political Activity		
16	Conversion Trouble: The Alawis of Hadhramawt, Empire, Gender and the Problem of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century South India WILSON CHACKO JACOB	287
17	' <i>Fatherland, Religion, Family</i> ': Exploring the History of a Slogan in Greece, 1880–1930 EFFI GAZI	304
18	The More Things Change: Debating Gender and Religion in India's Hindu Laws, 1920–2006 RINA VERMA WILLIAMS	315
	<b>Index</b>	329



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# Introduction: Beyond the ‘Religious Turn’? Past, Present and Future Perspectives in Gender History

*Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan*

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In the twenty-fifth anniversary year of *Gender & History*, this special issue on religion provides an opportune moment for the review and reassessment of an aspect of gender history that has developed a substantial scholarship and witnessed important historiographical shifts both before and since the 1980s. As a capacious heuristic category, ‘religion’ stands in for a range of meanings historically, from the highly individuated interior experience of prayer and mysticism to the public corporate structures of institutional or national religious politics. As the various contributors to this volume illustrate, religious discourses can be expressed through private contemplation, worship rituals, sacred works of art, spiritual communities, associational networks and nationalist agendas. They have been appropriated performatively by women and men in the past as part of both individual identity formations and socio-political practices. In what ways, then, might an analysis of religion help us rethink the current frameworks and narratives of histories of gender and, conversely, how might a focus on gender and sexuality illuminate the past interactions of religion and culture? These questions framed a stimulating two-day international symposium held in September 2012 at the University of York from which this volume developed, where speakers debated the tenacious and creative power of religion in fashioning gendered selves across a wide geographical, spiritual and chronological spectrum. Spanning almost 4,000 years from the second millennium BCE to the twenty-first century, the interlocking narratives of religion and gender were scrutinised from ancient Mesopotamia to renaissance Milan, from Song China to post-revolutionary Mexico, from medieval Ireland to modern Spain and Cuba, and from early modern England to nineteenth-century India.

Several major themes emerged from the symposium and are enlarged upon here: that we live in a world which is both increasingly secular and increasingly religious, and that within this paradox issues concerning gender and sexuality constitute repeated points of crisis and rupture; that in a field committed to exploring relations of difference through gender, age, ethnicity, class or sexual orientation, gender history has not always accorded religious differences a similar analytical force, subsuming them within national, ethnic or other cultural identities; following on from this point – ‘theology

really matters'. As the exposition of a given faith's encounter with, and revelation of, the divine (an essentially metaphysical experience), theology has often been collapsed by historians into its wider social and more visible counterpart, religion. Yet as Dominic Erdozain warns, the omission of theology reduces religion to little more than a reflection or determinant of culture. In neglecting theological heterogeneity, the material impact of differing doctrines and beliefs upon the lives of men and women is obscured.<sup>1</sup> For gender historians, this loss is particularly significant in understanding how hegemonies are made and maintained. As feminist theologians have demonstrated, symbolic and anthropomorphic images of the divine are saturated with gender constructs, often with important, if inconsistent implications for the temporal gender order. Patriarchy may have been well served, although sometimes subverted, by the Christian symbols of God the Father and Son, Eve and the Virgin Mary, but what were the lived gender effects of Hindu goddess cults such as that of Kali with its maternal and warrior-like representations of femininity, or Nahua deities of Central Mexico who transgressed gender binaries?<sup>2</sup>

Since its establishment, *Gender & History* has contributed regularly to the historiography of gender and religion through a wide range of articles. Among other subjects these have examined medieval convent spirituality, early modern Islamic conversion narratives, masculinity and priestly power in medieval Normandy and Florence, Jewish women in the Holocaust, Australian missionary masculinities and Aboriginal peoples, clerical marriage in the English and German reformations, diasporic West African spiritualities, Irish Catholic masculinity, Scottish missionaries and sexual misconduct, female Quaker ministries, and modern Italian and Argentinian Catholic women's organisations.<sup>3</sup> A significant increase in articles centred on religion in the nineties and 'noughties' reflects a more general 'religious turn' in cultural history. Our introduction focuses upon past, present and future perspectives on the history of gender and religion, identifying some of the major tropes, narratives and turning-points to date, situating the volume's contents within some currently important themes in gender history and suggesting future potentialities for this burgeoning field.

## Past perspectives

The earliest and most extensive historiographies of gender and religion over the last forty years have dealt with Christianity in its multiple forms. This literature, particularly in the anglophone world, has manifested interesting, albeit uneven developments shaped by diverse national contexts. In the USA, landmark articles such as Barbara Welter's 'The Cult of True Womanhood' (1966) and 'The Feminisation of American Religion, 1800–1860' (1974), led the way in identifying religion's formative contribution to one of the major organising tropes of women's history, 'separate spheres' ideology.<sup>4</sup> Since then, an enormous literature on American women and religion has been forthcoming which, as Catherine Brekus observes, 'virtually defies categorization'. Numerous studies of the beliefs and practices of enslaved women, African American holiness preachers, Catholic, Protestant, Mormon and Jewish men and women in addition to Native American forms of spirituality have been produced, despite a relative decline in interest during the 1980s due to the rise of the Religious Right and its ultra-conservative gender and sexual politics.<sup>5</sup> In Britain, the socialist-feminist focus of much early gender history often marginalised religion as of limited relevance for understanding women's economic and political disadvantages. Nonetheless, Barbara Taylor's work has acknowledged

the interaction of religious with other intellectual and political influences in the writings and activism of Owenite feminists and Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>6</sup> As the early modern historian Patricia Crawford would later comment, the religious subject appeared unexciting – all too often ‘the godly woman was the successfully socialised woman’.<sup>7</sup> However, in its iconic reading of the role of gender in the formation of the middle classes, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall’s *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (1987) provided what remains one of the most nuanced readings of Victorian evangelicalism and its contradictory implications for hegemonic constructions of both femininity and masculinity.<sup>8</sup> It modelled an approach with rich possibilities for those working on gender and religion in other contexts.

One of the dominant narratives to emerge in modern scholarship recounts the ‘feminisation of religion’, a multivalent thesis originating in work on American Protestantism focused on women’s greater preponderance in religious and church life and the increasing cultural designation of women as the more pious sex. Despite numerous studies of this phenomenon in Europe, North America and Australia, the theory has received increasing criticism as an overly simplistic formula that disregards both free-thinking, secularist and atheist women – many of whom, like the atheist and broadcaster Margaret Knight, attracted considerable vilification – and devout men (discussed later in this introduction).<sup>9</sup> The ‘feminisation of religion’ theory, it is argued, reinscribes gender binaries and essentialises the very categories that require historical interrogation. It is also quite religiously specific. In Judaism, for example, it was certainly the case that pioneering women such as Lily Montagu and Ray Frank engaged in quasi-theological forms of social and educational activities among their co-religionists, as shown by Jean Spence, Shari Rabin and Susan L. Tananbaum.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, Anne Summers has argued that the feminisation theory remains ‘largely inapplicable’ to modern western Jewish communities where, with women excluded from the rabbinate until the 1970s, religious practice remained overwhelmingly male and women’s responsibility for Sabbath observance was a largely domestic affair. Benjamin Baader’s work on nineteenth-century Judaism and bourgeois culture in Germany, however, suggests a more complex picture.<sup>11</sup>

A flourishing body of work on religion and women’s historical agency, often using interpretative models such as ‘women’s culture’ and ‘female associational networks’ in studies of family life, philanthropy, missionary activity, sisterhoods, preaching and social reform, suggests that the feminisation theory persists.<sup>12</sup> The extent to which female religious activism might be designated ‘feminist’ has also prompted long-standing and unresolved debate. Feminism could be nurtured by heterodox forms of spirituality such as theosophy, Christian Science or the Babi-Baha’i tradition, and by religious scepticism or secularism. Recent work on women and gender in the Buddhist, Jewish and Hindu traditions has similarly recuperated women’s agency, opening up gendered analyses of beliefs, texts and practices, and exploring the issues of embodiment and sexuality which interest several authors in this special issue.<sup>13</sup> Work by Padma Anagol, Patricia Grimshaw, Rhonda Semple and others shows that religiously derived feminisms were often the product of complex transnational and local circulations of ideas, and of religiously syncretic interactions between colonial missionary and indigenous women’s discourses. Transcultural and trans-spatial approaches to gender and religion, approaches which appear in some of the articles published here, have informed discussions of cross-confessional encounters in the Iberian peninsula as well as in

early modern colonial settings in the Americas.<sup>14</sup> Jacqueline de Vries has shown how suffragists often appropriated religious tropes, symbols and rituals, while others note that critical issues of liberal reform or civil rights often transcended religious differences while including faith-specific features.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, theoretical analyses of the causal relationship between mainstream religious traditions and feminism seem inconclusive, with historians acknowledging religion's ability to mobilise women while simultaneously critiquing its tendency to delimit the radicalism of feminist ideas. As Immaculada Blasco Herranz has commented in her study of female Spanish Catholic militancy, such approaches reveal 'a form of cultural ascent towards both a feminist consciousness and women's emancipation' of an essentially secular kind.<sup>16</sup> The early modern historian Sarah Apetrei remains similarly unconvinced by readings of religion as a 'kind of implacable patriarchal intelligence' against which women engaged in various 'imaginative and intellectual gymnastics' seeking to circumvent its more oppressive traits. Religion, she reminds us, 'was not just the envelope for an unconsciously secular or self-serving agenda: it was the very origin and goal of feminism'.<sup>17</sup> In her studies of seventeenth-century female visionaries and eighteenth-century Methodist radicals, Phyllis Mack argues that self-transcendence rather than self-advancement was their core spiritual aim. Carmen Mangion has similarly shown that women entering convents and sisterhoods were less interested in challenging the status quo than in pursuing a 'higher calling'. Conceptualising authority in terms of humility, and agency in terms of 'lack' (lack of status, autonomy or even gender, as Mack famously phrases it) means that taking religion 'on its own terms' poses considerable conceptual challenges for feminist and gender historians.<sup>18</sup>

The recent global rise of new religious politics provides contemporary examples of women's support for so-called 'fundamentalist' movements with their frequently restrictive attitudes towards gender roles and sexuality. The instabilities created by environmental disasters, the failure of secular projects (whether nationalist, leftist or liberal), capitalism's global exploitation of the markets and labour, and the resulting poverty and destabilisation of family structures have provided opportunities for new forms of religiously inspired social and political action around faith-branded organisations. According to Martin Riesebrodt and Kelly H. Chong, this not only contends with other political forces at the level of state or community, but also acts as a means to access "'higher powers" in order to prevent crises or cope with them when they have occurred'.<sup>19</sup> Nor do religious 'fundamentalisms' necessarily negate female agency or interests in the views of adherents. As with right-wing movements of the interwar years, religious nationalisms are regarded by many women as providing greater protection and self-respect for their established familial roles, whether in the USA, Latin America, India or the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> Numerous studies of modern refigurations of 'Islamic' female dress codes have established how, for women who wish to study or work outside the home, they can provide protection from communal, patriarchal or familial criticism, and access to a degree of personal autonomy.<sup>21</sup>

The mobilisation of Iranian women in the anti-Shah movement of the late 1970s produced complex contradictions and intersections between the use of control over women as a flagship policy of the post-1979 'Islamic' regime, the expansion of educational opportunity and public visibility for women, and both dissenting Muslim and liberal women's critiques of the official version of Islam. Arguably it is the strongly patriarchal family forms and communal investment in ideas of reputation and



respectability with their religious inflections which constrain women quite as much as regime policy, as is also the case in the different political and economic setting of Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> In the USA, family and sexuality also became core terrains for religious conservatives from the mid-1980s, and, as in South Korea, female participation in Christian church life became a welcome and acceptable form of relief from the restrictions of the patriarchal family structure. The literal and symbolic roles of the female body and sexuality have been ubiquitous, notably the stance of the US Christian right on abortion and homosexuality (the latter paralleled among evangelical Christians in Africa and various Muslim and Hindu groups). Powerful configurations of gender, religion and body politics have sustained contemporary reaffirmations and refiguring of conventions of body covering, genital cutting, or widow burning.<sup>23</sup>

Hindu nationalism has involved female grassroots activism in India where Hindu women have mobilised against Muslim women.<sup>24</sup> Other religious nationalisms in South Asia and the Middle East are inseparable from their anti-colonial origins and opposition to 'contaminating' western influences. Gendered rhetorics of religio-cultural authenticity entwine with invocations of scriptural tradition, but also with appropriations of the discourses of modernity. Thus Muslim and Hindu as well as Christian faith groups affirm the authority of established texts and practices while simultaneously asserting their conformability with 'modern' ideals of equity, opportunity and progress. In Iran, reformist Muslim intellectuals such as Ali Shari'ati attempted to align patriarchal gender prescriptions with a world in which articulate women staked modern claims to be heard; just as in Egypt the Muslim Brothers recognised spaces for autonomous activity by Muslim sisters. In Egypt and Iran, learned and pious women re-read sacred texts and challenged male-led claims to define 'right' versions of Islam. As with early modern European religious controversies, contests over the authoritative interpretation of texts and the ownership of that activity were powerfully inflected by gender politics.<sup>25</sup>

Women's recurrent representation as distinctive repositories of piety in many belief systems has meant that histories of masculinity and religion have been slower to emerge, although medievalists have produced important work in this field.<sup>26</sup> As Yvonne Werner has noted, if religion was gendered female, then 'religion and modern masculinity . . . seemed incompatible'.<sup>27</sup> Much work remains to be done on religious masculinities, both lay and clerical, as well as on men's negotiations of the growing dissonances between secular and spiritual codes of manliness in modern times. Here, recourse to a rhetoric of paradox is tempting. Within the gendered power structures of institutional religion, men have exercised undeniable levels of power and privilege with adverse results for women's spiritual, social and professional equality. (Remarkably, women's struggle for religious leadership and the historicisation of various forms of reassertion by religious patriarchies remains an under-explored narrative within modern gender and religion.) Interestingly, confronted with dominant ideals of the competitive, promiscuous, rational and materialistic secular male subject within the wider culture, devout men have inhabited an increasingly precarious historical terrain. Nowhere has this cultural contradiction been more literally embodied than in the suspect, peripheral masculinity of the clergy or, as George Eliot described them, a third 'clerical' sex.<sup>28</sup> Anti-clericalist sentiment has emerged at various past moments of popular political agitation expressed in plebeian, liberal and anti-puritan critiques, often accompanied, as Hugh McLeod shows for nineteenth-century England, by masculinist anti-clerical rhetoric directed against flamboyant 'effeminate' Anglo- or Roman

Catholic priesthoods. Comparable Protestant rhetorics were deployed in Germany and the UK against gaudy, 'feminised' Jews, whether prominent individuals like Disraeli or more generally Jewish migrants, 'white slave traders' or entrepreneurs.<sup>29</sup>

The perception of religion as increasingly feminised, the churches' declining ability to appeal to men, and a resulting 'crisis model' of modern religious masculinity has attained the status of historiographical orthodoxy in the field. Scholars have shown that attempts to buttress a dwindling religiously oriented masculinity from the 1850s onwards by emphasising muscularity, militarism, sporting prowess or heroism were a global phenomenon. Studies of the unstable but dominant trope of 'muscular Christianity' have been undertaken in numerous national contexts including Sweden, France, Canada, Germany, Australia, Ireland, Belgium and Spain as well as the USA and UK, each illustrating various theological emphases and narratives of decline.<sup>30</sup> In addition the transnational expression of muscular Christianity through the central topos of sport shows how interconnections between colonial and metropolitan identities of religion and gender cannot be understood solely through unidirectional, imperialist notions of the effeminate Hindu or the aggressively martial Sikh.<sup>31</sup> Instead, indigenous appropriations and a 'new logic of postcolonial hybridity' meant that Indians living under British colonial rule, or recipients of missionary activity in Japan, successfully de-Christianised and transformed the 'muscular Christian' ethic within new nationally and religiously specific formations such as muscular Hinduism or Japanese Bushido.<sup>32</sup> Joseph Alter argues that the yoga renaissance led by men like Swami Vivekananda, so central to muscular Hinduism in the late nineteenth century, represented a transcultural effort to reconceive relations between the body, morality and spirituality and thus requires a global rather than simplistically colonial analytical framework.<sup>33</sup> Modern Buddhism, regarded by some as eminently appealing to men due to its reputation for rationalism, intellectualism and practical self-help, was similarly spiritually and ethnically multi-directional between South Asia, China, Europe and America.<sup>34</sup>

Like muscular Christianity, muscular Judaism in central and western Europe and the USA also focused upon physical strength and moral virtue. Although a minority movement, Zionism 'constituted a significant means of displaying a new Jewish male type' counteracting anti-Semitic stereotypes of passive, weak, scholarly Jews through an actively heterosexual representation of Max Nordau's *muskeljudentum*.<sup>35</sup> For many migrant communities, the desire to minimise 'alienness' and encourage acculturation could result in conservative gender and sexual politics, as the work of Lara Marks, Rickie Burman and Paula Hyman illustrates.<sup>36</sup> Their studies of Jewish communities parallel work on migrant Hindus and Muslims. As a result, new formations of migrant and diasporic gender identities were under constant (re)construction, shot through with differing inter-generational tensions and theological positions.

Attention to religion can provide gender historians with new ideas about hegemonic male identities and their relationship with marginalised, subordinate and complicit masculinities. Historians of medieval Christianity have contributed significantly to this process, exploring the emergence of Christianised masculinities, their intersections with pre- and non-Christian meanings and performances of 'manliness', and their complex links to expressions of sexuality.<sup>37</sup> According to Erin Bell, early Quaker men preached nonviolence, propounding a masculinity which challenged dominant early modern codes of aggressive male competition and authority, yet still maintained traditional gender power structures within the Quaker community. The way in which religious communities sought to secure their own theological identities through cultural

differentiation while seeking wider social acceptance is similarly highlighted in Sara Patterson's discussion of Mormon masculinity in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Here the legally required shift to monogamy necessitated new models of Mormon manhood marked by the dominant cultural virtues of business, patriotism and good citizenship rather than by polygamy.<sup>38</sup>

Alex Shepard and Garthine Walker have observed that cultural historians' preference for synchronic readings of the multiple meanings of masculinity or femininity has tended to forestall diachronic analyses of gender's role as a catalyst for historical change.<sup>39</sup> Several articles in this special issue interrogate conventional readings of historical periods such as the Renaissance, or map longer-term shifts in legislative attitudes to, and textual representations of, specific religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. However, the analysis of the role of gender in generating new periodisations of religion in the past has barely begun. Recent revisionist debates in religious history concerning the periodisation of secularisation and its complex relationship with modernity have received extensive attention, with Christianity's 'cultural displacement' relocated as late as the 1960s, a decade identified by arch-revisionist Callum Brown as witnessing the 'death of Christian Britain'.<sup>40</sup> Most significantly, gender rather than class-based analysis is given a crucial role in this shift. 'Gender', Brown asserts, 'is emerging as possibly the single most important definer of the timing and content of long-term change to the Christian religion of Europe'.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to compare the emergence of 'postsecular' perspectives (discussed later) which take interactive rather than oppositional views of secular and Christian thought and practice, with the historiography of Islam and gender which still struggles to move away from working within that binary.

## **Present perspectives**

In the chapters which follow, the 'cultural historical' approach to the past is heavily, but not exclusively, in evidence, as authors explore the ambiguous discursive effects of religious behaviour and theological ideas on notions of gender and sexuality and the material contexts in which they were produced, normalised and resisted. Most contributors present religion as a prism through which men and women, individually and collectively, experienced a range of political, theological, social and sexual encounters. 'Difference' is writ large in this, as in all gender history; what it means to be religious cannot be understood without reference to issues of gender, age, class, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Nor is religiosity itself a fixed state. Several chapters make clear that one is never 'merely' Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist, just as one is never merely male or female, black or white. Instead, authors illustrate that not only are religious identities constantly inflected by other categories of difference but also that they are configured through both peaceful means and violent warfare. The following discussions revolve around four important current trajectories in the history of gender and religion around which we have structured the volume: transcultural exchanges, the body, sexuality and political aspects of religion.

## **Crossing cultures, and transcultural exchanges**

Cultural syncretism, pluralism and spatial mobility are at the core of the history of many religions, and thus transcultural approaches to that history are crucially relevant to

historians' analyses of religion in various periods and places. The spread of Buddhism from India into eastern Asia, of Islam from Arabia around the eastern and southern Mediterranean into central and south Asia, or of early Christianity from the eastern Mediterranean across Europe, involved complex interactions between the beliefs and practices of an expanding faith and those in the communities which it encountered. This can be seen in the growth of church-state relations and medieval sainthood in western Europe which developed out of accommodations between Christian, Roman and 'barbarian' elements, in the emergence of distinctive Tibetan, Sinhala or Chinese forms of Buddhism, and again in the crafting of the Muslim caliphate and of Sufi traditions from encounters between Muslim practices and Iranian or Indian influences. By the early modern period, as conquest and imperial power underpinned the expansion of Islam in India, of eastern Orthodoxy among the Slavs, of Roman Catholicism in the Americas and Asia, and of Protestantisms in North America and the Caribbean, new elements of cross-cultural exchange were layered into religious lives and institutions. The sharing of shrines and festivals by Muslim and Hindu villagers in northern India, the Mexican day of the dead and the crafting of Afro-Christian faiths among enslaved people in the Caribbean or Brazil, were outcomes of cross-cultural contacts shaped partly by state power and/or capitalistic colonial relationships. The more recent expressions of transcultural exchange across faiths and cultures, which are the focus of the pieces in this section of the volume, are thus embedded in longer histories. The legacy of Spanish rule in Mexico and long-standing Mexican links to the USA, like the centuries-long presence of Buddhism in China and of people of African descent in Cuba, as well as the extended period of British involvement in India, frame the specific topics discussed in those articles.

Gender is likewise central to studies of transcultural aspects of religious faith and practice. Gender practices ranging from dress codes to marriage and reproductive and sexual conduct have been constitutive of religious doctrines and of their collective or individual enactments in many faiths. Belief and practice have often been constituted around gender differences and roles for specialists and believers, and politicised by contests over, or subversions of, such differences; they may also be terrains on which gender difference can be sidestepped or problematised. As powerful and often persistent markers of material, political and cultural differences, gender arrangements and ideologies are likely to be important features in transcultural encounters between diverse faiths and power structures. Travellers, missionaries, imperial agents and intellectuals have often read the 'otherness' of the cultures which they encountered through the prisms of faith and gender, and colonial rulers and subjects have engaged with the lived outcomes of such readings, generating sources and discourses for historical study. In this volume four contributions demonstrate what can be achieved by such study.

The era of British involvement in India from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries was one in which issues of religion and gender played out dynamically in the encounters of colonial subjects in the subcontinent with rulers and 'experts'. British scholars, administrators and missionaries constructed varied notions of 'Hindus', 'Muslims' and 'Indians' around gendered practices including polygamy, child marriage, the erotic content of temple art and culture, gender segregation and widow burning. Alongside this, inhabitants of the subcontinent developed their own constructions of gender and faith in the era of modernity, making their own contributions to cross-cultural discourses on these matters. This can be seen in the refiguring of marriage

and masculinity in colonial Bengal, in manoeuvrings around colonial restrictions by the courtesans of Lucknow, or in anti-colonial (often masculine) appropriations of gender rhetoric to assert cultural authenticity or claim leadership of 'reform'.<sup>42</sup> Daniel Grey's piece in this volume explores how British ideas of 'the Hindu' in the first part of the nineteenth century brought together perceptions of widow burning, '*thagi*' (banditry) and female infanticide as distinctively gendered 'Hindu' practices.<sup>43</sup> It suggests both the importance of considering the *convergence* of British views of these practices, linked by the use of bodily violence, and the way such views shaped British constructions of Hindu masculinity as well as femininity.

Grey emphasises that much cultural effort was made by colonial interpreters of female infanticide, *thagi* and widow burning to construct perpetrators as male. This allowed them to construct chivalric/pious rescuers and reformers as the embodiments of British masculinity (as Spivak's white men 'saving' brown women), and British femininity as morally active on behalf of subordinate colonial sisters, thereby locating Indian gender practices within 'bad' religion. It is shown to be significant that British commentators made efforts to erase the roles of women in infanticide, and of Muslims in *thagi*, in order to 'Hinduise' and gender their interpretations of these activities. In an interesting recasting of the 'mild Hindu' with his esoteric learning, favoured in much eighteenth-century British commentary on Hindu Indians, 'the Hindu' was now portrayed as savage and violent, moved to heinous acts by 'superstition' and 'fanaticism'. It may be noted that this reconstructed image drew on the growing ethnographic 'knowledge' (and imagination) of British observers like Sleeman, and the moral agendas of religious and secular reformers rather than on earlier engagement with religious texts and specialists. However, whether analysing the Shastras, reporting evidence from local informants, or constructing authoritative interpretations of the 'savage Hindu', Grey's argument shows the interplay of colonial authority with local knowledge, shaping a hybrid expertise in depicting and controlling colonial subjects.

One facet of the politics around widow burning in the 1820s was the involvement of educated Indian men in debating that question, whether as part of their own modernising agendas or in dialogue with colonial policy makers. If Grey's text deals with the role of colonial cultural power, Clare Midgley's study of interactions between the Bengal-based Brahma Samaj, British Unitarians and American transcendentalists explicitly takes up the theme of cross-cultural exchange and cooperation.<sup>44</sup> The Brahma venture can itself be seen as a syncretic project for developing links between Hinduism and cognate insights in other faiths, just as Unitarians and Transcendentalists explored notions of 'universal' religion. Midgley shows how the exchanges between Brahma and Unitarian writers and activists centred on the task of arguing and implementing progress for women whether in England or Bengal. It suggests that Indians, Britons and Americans involved in these activities in the mid-nineteenth century were constituting cross-faith transnational 'liberal' and 'reforming' projects and networks, prefigured in the work of intellectuals like Rammohun Roy in the 1820s and 1830s. The exploration of journals, individual activists and organisations, with their nuanced responses to religious ideas from both Hindu and heterodox Protestant traditions complicates simple adversarial notions of colonial cultural politics or faith encounters, and foregrounds gender as a core topic for pious as well as 'secular' liberals and reformers of the period. It is sensitive to internal disagreements among Brahma supporters over women's roles and autonomy and to Unitarian modifications to the cruder 'civilising

mission' stance of many Britons, not least because of their dissident location and critical voice within the UK Protestant spectrum. Both Brahmos and Unitarians could position themselves as questioning reformers of their local gender status quo. This raises the interesting question of how far this analysis of interactive, if not equal, Brahmo/Unitarian relationships might challenge other views of how British feminism fed off colonial privilege and racial/religious 'othering', as well as off opposition to gender disadvantage and discrimination.<sup>45</sup>

The historiography of the British *raj* in India has been a fertile ground for gender historians, including some who have focused on religion. However, the broader relevance of our themes is shown in other pieces which also emphasise cross-cultural exchange and religious syncretism in studies of Cuba, China and Mexico. Carolyn Watson examines transformations in practice and self-perception among followers of Ocha-Ifá, a religion of Yoruba origin established by Afro-Cubans in Cuba, as they responded to socio-political changes and cultural challenges between the era of slave emancipation in the 1890s and the present.<sup>46</sup> The article explores shifting gender roles, sexual meanings and interpretations of religious tradition among those involved in Ocha-Ifá. It considers the sexualised images of the faith constructed by Hispano-Cuban commentators, associating it with promiscuous extramarital sex in the early twentieth century, and with homosexuality and prostitution after the 1959 revolution. Watson also tracks contests and accommodations in gender roles and meanings within the cult from the 1930s as men took on divination roles performed by women, notably Victor Betancourt's late twentieth-century re-reading of African traditions which reaffirms female spiritual power and reframes gender and sexual identities among Ocha-Ifá initiates. The dense narrative enables analyses of the simultaneous preservation and reconstruction of West African traditions and the response of Ocha-Ifá followers to hetero-normative homophobic culture in Cuba, at odds with the sexual and gender fluidities which historically formed relationships between initiates, priests, the gods and seekers after spiritual favour. It demonstrates the agency and creativity of those involved in Ocha-Ifá over several generations, and the role of transnational and colonial legacies in their engagement with Yoruba traditions, and with the racialised legacies of colonial enslavement. Cross-cultural encounters with the dominant Hispanic or communist socio-political order and its changing sex-gender agendas, argues Watson, have shaped the survival and autonomy of Ocha-Ifá and its accommodation to those agendas.

Yuet Keung Lo's study of an eighteenth-century reworking of traditional biographies of Buddhist laywomen considers the intersections between faith traditions – two Buddhist pathways and Confucianism – in the work of Peng Jiqing, a pious Buddhist and Confucian scholar editing and supplementing texts inherited from earlier centuries.<sup>47</sup> Lo demonstrates how the editor's efforts at 'draconian' homogenisation of the lives of women following Chan or Pure Land versions of Buddhism within traditions of dynastic biography and Confucian convention did not conceal 'ideological incongruities and narrative differences'. This reveals both Peng's personal commitment to Confucian–Pure Land syncretism (which by his time included Chan Buddhist elements), and the different patterns of female religiosity in the two Buddhist traditions. Like the study of the lives of Irish saints in this issue by Zubin Mistry and the chapter on Assyriology by Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura (both discussed further below), this reminds us both of the key role of the cultural norms of editors and interpreters of texts, and of the fluidity and complexity of hagiography and Buddhist spiritual

practice. It thus offers perspectives on the varied ways in which Buddhist women might pursue their spiritual path, whether by assertive involvement with spiritual masters or by following more 'genteel' pious practices confirmed by such women's association with dreams and miracles. Readers see the gender, textual and doctrinal codes used to reconstitute long-gone lives in an eighteenth-century text. They can also glimpse women's negotiation of their own and others' spiritual expectations in an earlier period, as well as Peng's masculine scholarly negotiation of literary convention and religious syncretism to transmit models of female spirituality to his family and social circle.

The pieces by Lo and Watson explore change over time in conjunction with religious hybridity and fluidity. Kathleen MacIntyre's examination of the gendered presence of Baptists in the Oaxaca region of Mexico likewise deals intersectionally with pre-Christian faith practice, Roman Catholicism, Baptist Protestantism and the secularising agendas of the post-revolutionary period.<sup>48</sup> In considering the last of these, it invites further comparison with other contributions to this issue, specifically Joy Dixon's examination of the encounter of 'modern' psychological thought with Christian mysticism, Daniel Grey's work on 'secular' critiques of 'Hindu' practice, or Maya Corry's study of the links between humanism and Catholicism, noting that contact between the 'secular' and the 'religious' have been less studied than contests between them. MacIntyre's study of the 1920s and 1930s, and their more recent legacy, lays out the paradox of Baptist intervention in a Zapotec village being underpinned both by colonial discourses on 'backward' natives and by the new reformist nationalism of the post-Revolution Mexican regime. The role of Baptist women in this was marked by gendered approaches to missionary work (with a focus on childcare and food preparation among Zapotec women), by colonial/ethnic attitudes to 'natives' and by a commitment to civilising/modernising missions. Their appropriation of 'Catholic' discourses of martyrdom to depict the death of a male Baptist activist, and the use of tropes of progress and modernity to portray their work, like the transnational origins of Mexican Baptism in links to the USA, formed a cross-cultural basis for that work. Traditions of Protestant anti-Catholicism were refigured within a new civic/national culture in which Mexican women could be active if not enfranchised citizens, making or responding to calls of progress and Protestantism just as pious Catholic women actively resisted the new order. MacIntyre shows how the Baptist challenge to Catholicism was both faith-based and social, contesting established communal groupings, networks and festive gatherings, with their gendered patterns of participation, as well as sacred spaces and faith practices. The analysis illustrates the roles of religion, pro- and anti-Catholic female activism and memories of conflict and martyrdom in the shaping of new national/Christian/ethnic identities and differences both in the 1920s and 1930s, and at the present time.

The centrality of conversion, expansion and eclecticism in the history of so many faiths makes transcultural analysis an important tool for historians of religion. Discussion of the reworking of twelfth- and eighteenth-century Buddhism in relation to Confucianism, of re-readings of African religion in 1980s Cuba, and of links between modernising Hindus and Unitarians in nineteenth-century India and England illustrate the shaping roles of syncretic initiatives and cross-faith exchanges. They also demonstrate the gendered character of such initiatives and exchanges, whether constructing exemplars of Buddhist women, negotiating roles for male and female Ocha-Ifá priests in Cuba, or challenging Hindu widow burning and *thagi* and Zapotec women's Catholic and 'native' culture. By analysing the composite, changing versions

of sexed and gendered belief and practice in these diverse transcultural, colonial and postcolonial settings, this group of articles opens up a range of understandings and possibilities for future work on gender and religion. By setting the specificities of time and place in a dynamic relationship to spatial mobility and cultural hybridity, they offer models and challenges for that work.

### **Religion, embodiment and subjectivity**

The history of the body is a vibrant field of scholarship articulated in theoretically sophisticated discussions concerning, *inter alia*, periodisation, textual representations and the social disciplining and management of the body as constitutive of various national and political agendas (Foucault's influential notion of biopolitics).<sup>49</sup> In addition to its multiple historical understandings, the extent to which the material and physical experiences of the body can be fully assimilated into its discursive effects has stimulated much debate. In consequence, Kathleen Canning argues that 'the body' remains a largely elusive and unexplicated historical concept.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless its visual, material and symbolic centrality to the spiritual performances and identities of women and men, a dominant theme in this volume, is incontrovertible. Historically and theologically, the status of the body vis-à-vis the mind, soul or spirit has proved persistently contentious, regarded in highly gender-specific ways across many religious traditions as the site of physical temptation, impurity and mortal finitude. Yet despite such theological and doctrinal anti-somatism, as Esme Cleall notes in her discussion of the nineteenth-century deaf mute, 'religion is experienced through the body and the kind of body shapes the way in which religion is felt and practised'. Arguably anti-somatism does not so much deny the body as make it central to faith, thought and practice. Whether in the meditation techniques of Hindu Swamis, medieval Christian veneration of saintly relics, belief in the curative power of bodily effluvia, Muslim and Jewish dietary laws, or the physical demands of pilgrimage in many faiths, demonstrated in pieces in this section and elsewhere, the body remains a significant site of divine revelation. Stress on bodily suffering or asceticism in sainthood and martyrdom in Christian and Muslim traditions, or on the search for transcendence of the body in Hindu and Buddhist faiths, embed somatic tropes in belief and practice. The role of religiously sanctioned and gender specific codes for dress and body presentation, whether for Hindu widows, pious Muslims, or Christian penitents and members of religious orders, is another pervasive expression of the convergence between faith and body practices and meanings.<sup>51</sup>

The concept of 'embodiment' – what Canning has described as the process of 'making and doing the work of bodies – of becoming a body in social space' – best expresses the historically contingent and mutually constitutive ways in which differences of religion and gender have shaped individual subjectivities and their social representations.<sup>52</sup> As the religion of the incarnation, in which God took human form in the figure of Jesus Christ, the Christian tradition is the subject for many of the essays in this section. They can be compared with articles dealing with other traditions. Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura's discussion of Assyriological historiography focuses on the politics of gender at work in the (re)production of historical knowledge about the female body.<sup>53</sup> Despite the proliferation of languages, chronologies and geographies (and, by implication, notions of the sacred) found in cuneiform



texts, they argue that Jewish and rabbinical traditions of female 'purity' and 'impurity' disproportionately and adversely influenced decades of French translators' historical reconstructions of ancient Mesopotamian evidence on women. Negative Old Testament associations of menstruation with contagion and impurity have persisted in the face of textual evidence to the contrary, illustrated in Couto-Ferreira and Garcia-Ventura's examination of a Mari letter dating from the eighteenth century BCE. The false universalisation of a historically specific Jewish woman/impurity binary has, they propose, resulted in a misleading androcentric discourse within Assyriological studies.

Anne Bailey also explores the literary transmission and textual precedents of a particular female bodily performance, that of lamentation, this time in twelfth-century English and French hagiographies.<sup>54</sup> She observes that female lamentation was not the spontaneous, physical and frenzied outpouring of emotional and devotional grief commonly assumed, nor did it originate during the Middle Ages. Rather, its highly ritualised and formulaic elements, including body laceration and the tearing of clothes or hair, were the accretion of centuries of classical Greek, biblical and apocryphal traditions. It also recalls practices in Muslim communities, notably the ritualised public weeping associated with commemorations of the martyrdom of Husein in the Shi'a tradition. Despite Christian denunciations of lamentation as a pagan form of 'ritual madness', its key tropes of weeping, wailing and violent gesticulation were reconfigured as signs of divine grace in the lives of late medieval female saints and pious laywomen like Margery Kempe. Set within a ritualistic rather than a psychological framework, Bailey follows Caroline Walker Bynum's germinal thesis that public expressions of corporeal piety were taken up with particular enthusiasm by women as a means to empowerment and spiritual agency.<sup>55</sup> The extent to which hagiographical discourses of ritualised grief realistically portrayed women's devotional activities or were merely literary productions of conventional motifs remains unresolved, and Bailey suggests that cultural practices and representations of lamentation were probably mutually reinforcing.

The remaining three pieces in this section on viewing, sight and deafness, provide fascinating perspectives on the profoundly sensory experiences of faith. Working at the intersection of architectural and gender analysis, Michelle Sauer's innovative study of the female gaze and the medieval English anchorhold illustrates important ways in which physical space shaped individual piety.<sup>56</sup> Literally entombed in her cell, the anchoress lived permanently under the gaze of Christ, her spouse (and vice versa) through the squint, a window revealing the high altar and the consecration of the Mass. As Sauer reminds us, medieval ocular theory regarded sight as the most dangerous of the senses, related to both the gaining of knowledge and carnal desire. The complicating presence of the (potentially polluting) female anchorite's body within the cell's sacred space necessitated further architectural alteration. Squints in female-occupied cells were frequently given a cruciform shape, controlling the woman's view through the outline of Christ's own sacrifice. Others were positioned to narrow the sightline and compel penitential postures of kneeling or lying (an additional somatic discipline), thus mitigating the greater lustfulness of female sight and avoiding any undue eroticisation of the sacramental act of seeing.

The contiguity of the devotional and the sensual gaze is likewise considered by Maya Corry's absorbing analysis of the spiritual significance of beauty, youth and the male body in the iconography of 'Leonardesque' pictures produced for the court of

renaissance Milan.<sup>57</sup> According to Corry, art historians have seriously underestimated the contribution of religious ideas to such pictures, reading them as little more than derivative imitations of Leonardo da Vinci's work, with their presumed clues to his personal sexual proclivities. Instead she proposes that these androgynous images operated as 'serious devotional tools' in elite Italian culture, augmenting wider theories of visible bodily beauty (exemplified by youth and the physical perfection of the male form) as an expression of interior holiness and virtue. As in Sauer's piece, Corry argues that sight was thought dangerous and apt to stimulate both devotional revelation and sinful erotic thoughts. However the androgyny of these Leonardesque male forms, representing the harmony of gender and divine perfection, rendered them transcendental and humanly unattainable. Thus the androgynous body could inspire a focus on the sacred rather than a sexual response.

As a new subject of historical analysis, the topic of the deaf mute examined by Esme Cleall both extends and complicates the intersectionality of religion and gender as categories of difference within embodied religious experience.<sup>58</sup> Most significantly, Cleall's analysis of religious discourses on deafness in nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland challenges the role of gender as a defining category of identity, arguing that it was deafness, not sexual difference, that destabilised the personhood and subjectivity of those unable to hear the word of God. In a predominantly evangelical, biblically-based culture (and Cleall's discussion of the New Testament's problematic alignment of able-bodiedness with salvation is striking), deafness was a decisive form of 'otherness'. As a newly created missionary domain of social regulation, the devout deaf subject (suitably desexualised and emotionally infantilised in specifically gendered ways) became a popular Victorian trope. Cleall notes that Christian missions could also function as spaces of resistance for deaf identity and community formations. While still largely ignored by historians, the difference represented by disability poses a profound theoretical challenge to histories of gender, religion and the body: as Cleall puts it, 'when identities of religion, gender and disability coincide, they change, they do not simply compile'.<sup>59</sup>

### **Religion, gender and sexuality**

Arguably it is in the history of sexuality – a protean concept including the private emotional, psychological and imaginative aspects of individual desire, and the wider social and political implications of moral conduct – more than any other area of modern gender history that post-secular approaches have most revitalised interest in deconstructing the boundaries of the sacred and the secular. Historians like Dagmar Herzog, Anna Clark, Timothy Jones, Harry Cocks, Joy Dixon and Marcus Collins have increasingly acknowledged the influence of religious and spiritual discourses in the making of modern sexual cultures.<sup>60</sup> This is not to deny that, post Foucault, the field remains dominated by accounts of the inexorable medicalisation and secularisation of modern sex, shifting from a once sinful to a criminal, then pathological category. Nor is it to ignore institutional religion's powerful capacity as a site of sexual knowledge to reinforce heteronormative identities and censor alternative male and female sexualities often in coercive ways; indeed, it is precisely because of this continuing legacy that the sexual politics of religion merits further historical attention. However, a body of work now exists which deals excitingly with religious discourses on

marriage, contraception and homosexuality, and the reciprocity of scientific discourses such as sexology or psychology and heterodox spiritualities. Other work considers the importance of conservative sexual politics in the acculturation of immigrant religious communities, and the gendered dimensions of the churches' public involvement in anti-vice campaigns over the last two centuries.<sup>61</sup> For some historians, sexuality and gender constitute the most productive formations through which to critically historicise (and recuperate) 'the religious' in a post-secular age. For others like Callum Brown, sex (specifically the sexual revolution of the 1960s) signals not the reconstruction of new potentialities but the death-knell of religion.<sup>62</sup> As with historians of Islam and of western Christianity in earlier periods, it is the gendered interactions and hybridities of sacred and secular which are seen as productive fields for enquiry.

The chapters in this section assert the deeply imbricated nature of religion and sexuality as significant cultural formations, tracing diverse ways in which differing Christian theologies have shaped sexual identities and practices between the seventh and twentieth centuries. Zubin Mistry explores the remarkable fluidity of sexual categories present in the early medieval Irish historiography of 'abortion miracles' where sexually lapsed religious women were restored to virginal status through the intervention of male and female abortionist saints.<sup>63</sup> He observes that sexual chastity was a crucial but fragile sign of religious distinction, a status as much spiritual as physical. Later redactors often omitted these seventh-century abortion motifs, discomfited by the prospect of an impregnated devout woman and the termination of life. Like the commentators on Assyrian texts discussed by Couto-Ferreira and Garcia-Ventura, those editors brought their own cultural baggage to their work. According to Mistry, however, what made these acts of recuperative chastity miraculous – the reconciliation of individuals with their communities after the disruption of sexual sin – 'gravitates around gender in a different sense'. In abortion miracles, the disappearance of an unwanted foetus redeemed the woman from the physical and symbolic degradation of a bloody miscarriage or childbirth itself – at once a strikingly permissive and conventional attitude towards female sexuality. Chastity, and with it the avoidance of marital sex and parturition, contends Mistry, enabled a transformation of gendered practice, even as it was transgressed.

Pat Cullum also discusses chastity and the significance of spiritual rather than physical virginity in her essay on the attractions of the celibate life for late-medieval English laymen.<sup>64</sup> Married men, she notes, could affirm their virginal status by entering monastic life later in old age; the appeal of lay celibacy was evident in cults of virgin bishops and saints as well as in the popular lives of virgin kings whose non-sexual existence symbolised the unity, peace and sexual well-being of the kingdom and its subjects. Cullum makes the important point that despite celibacy remaining the only sanctioned alternative to marriage within many religions, and being attributed superior spiritual authority within Roman Catholicism, it is non-sexual rather than homosexual men who have disappeared from view in recent histories of sexuality. The naturalisation of compulsory male (hetero)sexuality (itself the gendered product of the modern period, as Cullum reminds us) has rendered male chastity as a positive sexual choice something of a 'cultural fiction'. In contrast, Joseph Alter's work shows how male celibacy within Hinduism was linked more positively to national strength and moral integrity.<sup>65</sup> Yet while histories of female celibacy show that single women and women religious often transformed their lives into respectable and respected public

forms of spiritual and moral service, celibacy's contested status as sexually transgressive and the source of inter-denominational and inter-religious conflict has persisted. The Victorian revival of Catholic and Anglican sisterhoods stimulated debate on the sexual dangers of conventual life and its challenge to the heterosexual Protestant family idyll, feeding into virulent anti-Catholic propaganda in what Ellis Hanson has described as the 'pornography of Puritanism'.<sup>66</sup> This echoes sixteenth-century contests over celibacy within emergent Protestant thought and practice. As Cullum observes, the history of celibacy in the history of modern sexuality has yet to be written, and if we occlude men's interest in that, we simply reinscribe conventional sexual binaries.

Christian theological imperatives to heterosexuality framed by 'holy matrimony' were ubiquitous, but religious discourse could also facilitate emotional and physical spaces for the performance of dissident sexualities. According to Harry Cocks, pre-modern western Christianity was in many ways 'culturally queer', expressed through 'a variety of polymorphous and unspecific transgressions of gender and sexuality'.<sup>67</sup> Susan Gane's absorbing exploration of the spiritual dynamics of two eighteenth-century soldiers' same-sex love and the reaction of their military and religious contemporaries attests to this.<sup>68</sup> She notes that more threatening to martial masculinity than physical same-sex passion were these men's mutual emotional support and religious commitment which enabled them to live out their unconventional homoerotic love. Recounted within a seemingly orthodox Methodist conversion narrative of fall and redemption, the swashbuckling Sampson Staniforth's references to 'the unpardonable sin' and 'sweet communion' reinforce Martha Vicinus's observations on the pervasiveness of religious metaphors in same-sex affections and the mutually constitutive vocabularies of religious ecstasy and sexual attraction.<sup>69</sup> Staniforth's co-existing marriage and Gane's reluctance to apply the label 'homosexual' to these men recall Anna Clark's concept of 'twilight moments' in which same-sex passion produced not fixed sexual identities but indeterminate zones between hetero- and homosexual practices where socially prohibited erotic behaviour could form part of ordinary life.<sup>70</sup> As Gane's essay shows, ardent piety was the determining factor in facilitating such emotional relationships. Religion, therefore, has much to offer historians when testing the limitations of identity history.

By the early twentieth century, the more fluid cultural status of same-sex friendships had diminished in the face of sexological and psychological classifications. The sexualisation of mystical experience in these new scientific vocabularies constructed undercurrents of hysteria and pathology in which religious enthusiasm and spiritual ecstasy were reconfigured by psychologists as perverted sexuality: the eroticised body had become an embarrassing impediment to, rather than a vehicle of, spiritual and mystical revelation. In her insightful exploration of the prominent Anglican modernist writer Evelyn Underhill, Joy Dixon discusses the complex theological tensions at work for those who, during a period of intellectual and scientific transformation, 'took both their religion and their psychology seriously'.<sup>71</sup> Underhill's efforts to promote a psychological theory of mysticism took her through a series of important theological manoeuvres: translating religious into psychological language led her to a reading of spirituality as a superior form of psychic energy and the sex instinct as a 'displacement or repression' of the 'God-instinct'. Dixon's perceptive essay demonstrates precisely how much 'theology matters' to histories of modern sexuality and gender by challenging fixed binaries of the sacred and the secular, and reconceptualising larger historical narratives of modernity and secularisation.

Mary Vincent likewise explores the theological antecedents of male and female sexuality in her discussion of inter- and intra-confessional religious violence in twentieth-century Spain.<sup>72</sup> Heightened by the hyper-reality of much Spanish religious iconography, Vincent argues that theological clashes between the body and the word were played out in particularly graphic and visceral ways during the 1930s and 1940s. Dagmar Herzog has shown how the use of sexual violence during times of war forms part of a spectrum of brutality including torture, mutilation and death.<sup>73</sup> Vincent's account illustrates the religious motivations behind such brutality, in which competing views of the incarnation, during and after the Spanish Civil War, produced denominationally specific forms of violence which were profoundly gendered and intensely sexual. According to Vincent, the recurrent castration and mutilation of priests' bodies throughout the military conflict was anti-religious as much as anti-clerical, their masculinity being representative not just of the Church's power but of the incarnate Christ himself. Perceptions of the deficiency of clerical masculinity are all too apparent in Vincent's compelling account. Priestly celibacy was seen as an affront to virile Spanish male sexuality as was the confessional, a powerful motif in anti-Catholic propaganda, regarded as prying into the sexual concerns of other men's wives and families. At a theological level, emphasis upon the suffering humanity of Christ in twentieth-century Spanish religious iconography, whether in worship or festivals, is an interesting inversion of traditional associations of women with the sexed body. Whereas holy statues of the Virgin Mary became increasingly devoid of associations with sexual or physical humanity, graphic artistic depictions of Christ's tortured and bleeding body identified men, and particularly clerical masculinity, as repositories of suffering.

### **Gender, religion and political activity**

As recent scholarship on 'political' Islam, on the politics of the 'religious right' in the USA, on Hindu communalism and on liberation theology has demonstrated, religious beliefs, communities and meanings have been constitutive of the political domain in many past settings. From the sexualisation of official attacks on medieval 'heresy', to partnerships between religious and governmental institutions in the regulation of sexual marital or reproductive conduct, gender has been a key feature of those processes. It is regrettable that this volume does not provide pre-modern examples in the tradition of Denise Spellberg's work on early Islam, Lyndal Roper's work on Reformation Europe, or on medieval holiness and kingship.<sup>74</sup> However the three pieces here, dealing with nineteenth- and twentieth-century situations in India and Greece, do make valuable contributions to the field.

Chronologically earliest is Wilson Chacko Jacob's discussion of the gendered dynamics of encounters between religious leadership in a Muslim community and the early British colonial state in Kerala, South India.<sup>75</sup> Engaging critically with Foucault's notions of governmentality and knowledge/power relations, it explores these encounters along the axes of political violence, conflicting sovereignties and gendered property rights between the 1770s and the 1850s. It suggests that as the Alawi Muslim Mappilas (not just a local grouping, but part of a transnational community) confronted Hindus, indigenous state structures and the encroaching British, 'religion and politics were mediated by gender, which in turn produced a new conception of all three'. It deconstructs British colonial texts and Mappila accounts of specific confrontational events to tease out divergent understandings of sovereign responsibility among British officials,

local landowners and Sayyid Alawi, the Mappila leader, in relation to gender, religious conversion and female modesty. The analysis disrupts linear readings of the advance of liberal colonialism, or 'east/west dichotomies', by showing how the personhood and 'rights' of the Kerala women whose conversion provoked conflict was marginalised by the 'modernising' colonial authorities and sustained by the spiritual and material authority of Sayyid Alawi. Its consideration of the use of categories such as the 'fanatical/violent Muslim' is reminiscent of Grey's piece in this volume. The sophisticated analysis of intersecting political agendas and unstable concepts offers richer and more subtle understandings of the gendered construction of colonial dominance, not simply 'over' colonial subjects, but in a complex web of different gendered politico-cultural agendas.

Like Jacob's piece, Effi Gazi's discussion of the history of ideas of 'Fatherland, Religion, Family' in Greek politics between the 1880s and the Second World War follows a long historical arc.<sup>76</sup> It relocates gender issues and images to a central position in accounts of the emergence of new forms of religiously inflected rightist rhetoric and activity in the challenged Greek polity of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Not only was the language of this reconstituted rightism explicitly anti-feminist, it targeted girls' education and women activists for public attack and physical violence, a phenomenon disregarded in other narratives of this right-wing movement. In both contexts, projects for the expansion of education and social opportunities for women were denigrated as flouting 'natural' female familial roles and mental capacities, a strategy which sat alongside rightist attacks on Marxist and Darwinist thought. Formed within confrontation politics at the start of the twentieth century, they passed their legacy on into the interwar period and cold war anti-communism. Gazi notes that this development was not unique to Greece but can be compared with developments in Italy, Iberia and France in the same period, making suggestive points about the opening up of spaces for 'right-wing feminism' within a repressive gender project. One aspect of the Greek situation discussed here which parallels accounts of religious complexity elsewhere in this volume, is the grounding of new rightist ideologies in innovative, even dissident trends within Greek Orthodox religion rather than in established tradition. Much of the politico-cultural work which underpinned the success of the triad 'Fatherland, religion, family' was undertaken by heterodox religious thinkers, and involved lay brotherhoods as much as the church hierarchy. The study offers readers new narratives which can be taken back into the ongoing discussions of the multivalent and contradictory aspects of 'modernity'.

Rina Williams's essay on the gendered politics of 'Hindu laws' in twentieth-century India also adopts a long arc approach, and explicitly establishes temporal comparison as its main strategy.<sup>77</sup> This enables the construction of an argument about the legacy of colonial practices regarding religiously based and gendered legislation in independent India. While exploring changes in both the terms and participants in the formation of 'personal' (i.e. family) laws on marriage and inheritance it proposes that 'the fundamentally religious and gendered character of governance' was a lasting legacy of colonial rule. In the 1950s, the makers of the legislative framework of independent India used the rhetoric of gender reform as a marker of progress and modernity much as it had been employed in colonial constructions of a civilising role, and matched this by appeals to text and custom in defence of existing practices comparable to those found in the colonial past. Although the balance of interest in