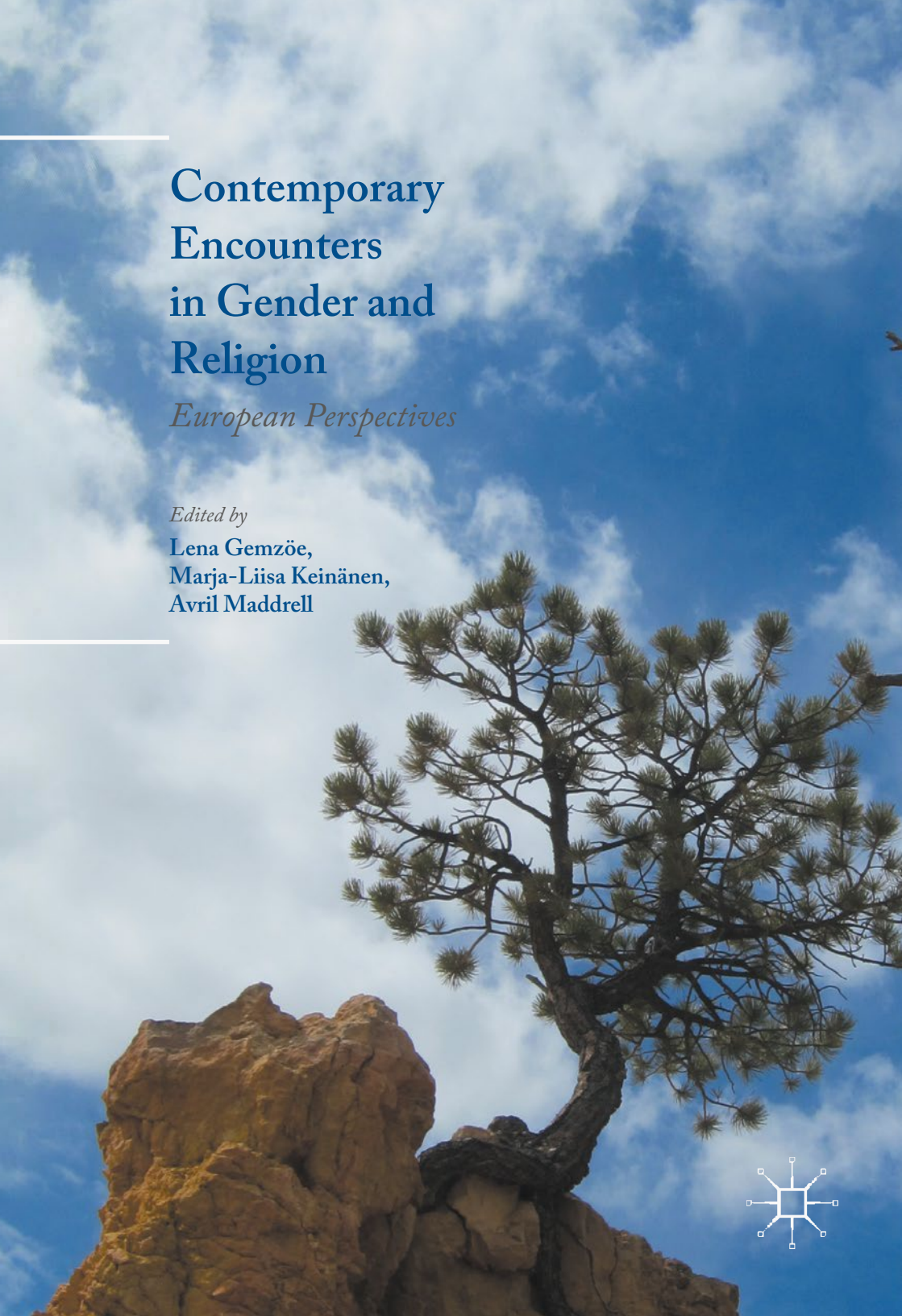
Contemporary Encounters in Gender and Religion

European Perspectives

Edited by

Lena Gemzöe,
Marja-Liisa Keinänen,
Avril Maddrell



Contemporary Encounters in Gender and Religion

Lena Gemzöe • Marja-Liisa Keinänen • Avril Maddrell
Editors

Contemporary Encounters in Gender and Religion

European Perspectives

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Lena Gemzöe
Stockholm University
Stockholm, Sweden

Marja-Liisa Keinänen
Stockholm University
Stockholm, Sweden

Avril Maddrell
Bristol, United Kingdom

ISBN 978-3-319-42597-9 ISBN 978-3-319-42598-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-42598-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016957528

Cover illustration: © Tree growing in arid ground by Avril Maddrell

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Jill Dubisch is Regents' Professor of Anthropology, Emerita, at Northern Arizona University and is currently working on New Age spiritual journeys. Her published work includes *Gender and Power in Rural Greece* (Princeton 1986), *In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender, and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine* (Princeton 1995), *Run for the Wall: Remembering Vietnam on a Motorcycle Pilgrimage* (with Raymond Michalowski, Rutgers, 2001) and *Pilgrimage and Healing* (with Michael Winkelman, Arizona, 2005).

Anna Fedele is a senior researcher at the Center for Research in Anthropology of the Lisbon University Institute and coordinates the Network for the Anthropology of Gender and Sexuality of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA). She is the author of the award-winning *Looking for Mary Magdalene: Alternative Pilgrimage and Ritual Creativity at Catholic Shrines in France* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and co-editor of *Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality* (Routledge, 2013) and *Encounters of Body and Soul in Contemporary Religious Practices* (Berghahn, 2011).

Lena Gemzöe is a social anthropologist and Associate Professor of Gender Studies at Stockholm University. Key publications in English include the monograph *Feminine Matters. Women's Religious Practices in a Portuguese Town* (Almqvist & Wiksell International 2000) as well as chapters on pilgrimage and related topics in *Pilgrimage and Healing* (2005), *Fat. The Anthropology of an Obsession* (2005), *Women's Everyday Religion*, (2010), *Moved by Mary. The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern*

World (2011) and *Gender, Nation and Religion in European Pilgrimage* (2012). Her recent publications in Swedish include an updated edition of *Feminism* (2014) and a co-edited volume on the topic *Fiction and Reality* (2016).

Alana Harris is a Lecturer in Modern British History at King's College London. Her research interests span the transnational history of Catholicism, gender and sexuality, pilgrimage and material culture. She has recently authored *Faith in the Family: A Lived Religious History of English Catholicism* (2013) and co-edited *Love and Romance in Britain* (2014) and *Rescripting Religion in the City: Migration and Religious Identity in the Modern Metropolis* (2014). Her new project is examining Catholic attitudes to contraception across the twentieth century, including the 'reception' of the Humanae Vitae Encyclical.

Willy Jansen is Professor Emerita of gender studies at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. She has done extensive anthropological fieldwork in the Middle East, North Africa and Southern Europe, and is involved in research projects on gender and ritual in Spain and on sexual rights in Bangladesh. Key publications include *Women Without Men. Gender and Marginality in an Algerian Town* (1987) and co-edited collections *Gender, Nation and Religion in European Pilgrimage* (2012) and *Moved by Mary. The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World* (2009).

Marja-Liisa Keinänen is Associate Professor of History of Religions and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies at Stockholm University. Her central research topics are vernacular religion and gender, especially women's ritual practice and ritual agency, as well as ethnicity and religion. Key publications in English include an edited collection *Perspectives on Women's Everyday Religion* (2010). Currently she is co-editing a collection in Swedish on language, culture and history of Finn Forests in Central Scandinavia.

Kim Knibbe (senior lecturer, faculty of theology and religious studies) is currently directing a project on religion, gender and sexuality in the African Diaspora based at the University of Groningen, funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. She is a fellow of the Centre for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain based in Groningen and is co-founder of the Network on the Anthropology of Gender and Sexuality (European Association for Social Anthropology). She is the

author of *Faith in the Familiar* (2013) and co-editor of *Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality* (2013).

Avril Maddrell is Associate Professor in Social and Cultural Geography at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol, and co-editor of the journal *Gender, Place and Culture*. Key publications include *Complex Locations. Women's Geographical Work in the UK 1850–1970* (2009), the co-authored monograph *Christian Pilgrimage, Landscape and Heritage* (2015) and the co-edited collections *Sacred Mobilities* (2015), *Deathscapes. Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning and Remembrance* (2010) and *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* (2010).

Catrien Notermans is an anthropologist and Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology and Development Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. She has undertaken extensive fieldwork in (Francophone) Africa, India and Europe, and has worked on religion and kinship from a gender perspective, and more recently, on people's spiritual relationships with nature. Key publications include the co-edited collections *Gender, Nation and Religion in European Pilgrimage* (2012) and *Moved by Mary. The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World* (2009).

Sarah-Jane Page is a sociologist of religion and lecturer at Aston University, Birmingham, UK. Her research interests include the study of religion in relation to sexuality, gender, feminism, clergy, young people and parenthood. A book based on the broader findings of the Religion, Youth and Sexuality project, co-written with Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip, was published by Ashgate in 2013 and is entitled *Religious and Sexual Identities: A Multi-Faith Exploration of Young Adults.*

Birgit Sauer is Professor of Political Science at the Department of Political Science at University of Vienna, Austria. She has published on gender, religion, governance and democracy, on federalism from a gender perspective and on affective labour and state transformation. Key publications include *Geschlecht und Politik. Institutionelle Verhältnisse, Verhinderungen und Chancen* (2004), *Die Asche des Souveräns. Staat und Demokratie in der Geschlechterdebatte* (2001) and *Affektives Kapital. Die Ökonomisierung der Gefühle im Arbeitsleben* (2016 gem. mit Otto Penz).

Lyn Thomas is part-time Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex and Emeritus Professor of Cultural Studies at London

Metropolitan University. Currently, she is working on class migrant intellectuals in Britain and France, and exploring class migrant identity and white femininity through the writing of her memoir *Clothes Pegs*, published at http://www.clothespegs.net/. Key publications include *Annie Ernaux, an Introduction to the Writer and Her Audience* (1999), *Fans, Feminisms and 'Quality' Media* (2002), the edited collection *Religion, Consumerism and Sustainability: Paradise Lost?* (Palgrave, 2010) and the co-edited collection *The Theory and Politics of Consuming Differently* (2008). She also co-authored *'Suspect Communities'? Counter-Terrorism Policy, the Press and the Impact on Irish and Muslim Communities in Britain* (2011).

Maya Turolla is a trained anthropologist (BA and MSc) in the fields of migration and gender studies. She is currently working on a PhD in Political Sciences, with a research project on sustainable agrifood chains and youth agripreneurship in Uganda and Rwanda. Her PhD is part of a partnership programme between the University of Bologna, Italy, and the Radboud University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Terhi Utriainen is Docent and Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religions at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research and teaching interests include ethnography of lived religion, gender and embodiment, ritual studies, death, dying and suffering. She is co-editor of *Post-Secular Society* (2012) and *Between Ancestors and Angels: Finnish Women Making Religion* (2014).

Elina Vuola is Academy Professor at the Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, Finland. She has been a visiting scholar at the Department of Religious Studies at Northwestern University (2014–2015), at Women's Studies in Religion Program, Harvard Divinity School (2002–2003), and at Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, San José, Costa Rica (1991–1993 and 1999–2000). She directs the research project *Embodied Religion. Changing Meanings of Body and Gender in Contemporary Forms of Religious Identity in* Finland, funded by the Academy of Finland (2002–2017).

Heather Walton is Professor of Theology and Creative Practice at the University of Glasgow and co-director of the Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts. She pioneered the teaching of feminist theology in the UK and has written widely on the relation between theology, feminism and cultural movements. Her books include *Literature, Theology and*

Feminism (2014) and *Imagining Theology: Women, Writing and God* (2007).

Linda Woodhead FAcSS, is Professor of Sociology of Religion at the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University, and Director of the Institute for Social Futures. Her books include *That Was the Church That Was: How the Church of England Lost the English People* (with Andrew Brown, 2016), *A Sociology of Prayer* (with Giuseppe Giordan, 2015), *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd revised edition 2014), *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe* (with Nathal Dessing and Nadia Jeldtoft, 2013), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (with Rebecca Catto, 2012), *A Sociology of Religious Emotions* (with Ole Riis, 2010) and *The Spiritual Revolution* (with Paul Heelas, 2005).

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

Contemporary Encounters in Gender and Religion: Introduction

Lena Gemzöe and Marja-Liisa Keinänen

In August 2013 a pregnant mother of three was physically assaulted in Farsta, a suburb of Stockholm. A man, unacquainted with the victim, grabbed her hijab, the Muslim headscarf, shouted 'people like you should not be here,' and bumped her head against a car so hard that she lost consciousness. The incident prompted five women to launch a *hijab-upprop* ('hijab call-to-action' in Swedish), exhorting 'all co-sisters in Sweden—religious and non-religious' to veil themselves (cover their heads) for one day in order to show solidarity with all Muslim women who endure violence and harassment.[1] The call received a massive response and social media was flooded with images of women from all backgrounds, among them several politicians, wearing a hijab. The activists who initiated the call were given attention in newspapers and on TV, thus managing to make the violence and discrimination directed toward Muslim women in Swedish society more visible. They also demanded that stronger measures be taken by the responsible authorities to tackle discrimination, and for a short period of time, Muslim women's own voices were being heard on the significance of wearing veils. At the same time there were also

L. Gemzöe • M.-L. Keinänen (✉)
Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

L. Gemzöe et al. (eds.), *Contemporary Encounters in Gender and Religion*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-42598-6_1

critical voices expressing the view that the veil is a symbol of women's oppression; therefore, using the veil in defense of women's rights would be contradictory.

The events leading up to Sweden's hijab call-to-action constitute familiar scenes in most European countries. Muslim minorities, often symbolically represented by the veiled Muslim woman, have become the main target of racist and anti-migration forces in Western Europe, who employ Islamophobic discourses to define boundaries of belonging (see Sauer, this volume). The debate in Sweden should be seen in the context of a growing awareness of the existence of racism in a country whose self-image has been built on tolerance and equality. This self-image has been torn down in recent years, exemplified by international media reports on the burning suburbs outside Stockholm, where second- or third-generation migrants defied police. The rise of a right-wing populist party as the third-largest political party in the Swedish Parliament following the 2014 elections, a party that repeatedly attacks Islamic culture, finally crushed the idea that Sweden could be an exemption to the political developments in the rest of Europe.

Yet seen from a comparative perspective, as elaborated by Birgit Sauer in her analysis of the headscarf debates (this volume), Sweden qualifies as a 'tolerant' country regarding headscarf (and related) politics. The country's jurisdiction clearly supports Muslim women's right to wear the hijab in public, a view that has been supported with fervor by leading Swedish politicians, in contrast to France, for example.

However, the hijab call-to-action did something more than manifest solidarity between natives and migrants in Sweden, something of particular interest to this volume. It was a manifestation of a new relationship between feminism and religion in Sweden. To the multiple meanings that have been ascribed to the Muslim veil, yet another was added: donning a veil came to signify a manifestation of feminist solidarity and sisterhood between secular feminists and religious women. The call addressed women in the name of feminist sisterhood, and female politicians (among them the feminist Gudrun Schyman, leader of a feminist party) responded by wearing a veil for the day. This scenario makes it clear that feminism and religion can no longer be seen as non-connected spheres. This new relationship between feminism and religion has contributed to important shifts in the academic understanding of religion and to the 'new' relationship between feminist studies and studies of religion that will be explored by the contributors to this volume.

This account of the Swedish hijab call-to-action gives a snapshot of the ways in which Muslim women and their bodies and clothing have been placed at the center of public debates in Europe about the nexus of politics and religion. In important ways these debates form the background of what has been labeled the post-secular turn in the academy. This turn involves a questioning of earlier theories assuming that religion would gradually (continue to) lose importance as a social force in Europe and in the rest of the world. It implies instead that new theoretical frames are required to grasp what 'religion' is and will be in contemporary societies and how it is related to 'secularism', a project that has engaged a wide number of scholars (Casanova 1994; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008; Asad et al. 2009).

Moreover, and key to the topics explored in this volume, the Swedish hijab call-to-action follows a logic similar to the ways in which feminist studies have responded to the post-secular turn. It is through the so-called 'clash of civilizations debate' and the context of global politics that feminism and feminist scholarship have turned their attention to religion. Rosi Braidotti (2008) argues that the post-secular turn challenges European feminism because it makes manifest that a one-sided identification with a secular critique of religion, one that feminism has generally been committed to historically, risks being joined to anti-feminist forces. Instead, feminism and feminist studies need to recognize a more nuanced scenario in which religious women can be political subjects and sisters in need of solidarity. This standpoint sums up the position of the Swedish hijab call-to-action and of the feminists supporting it. It is also in keeping with the dominant intersectional approach in Western feminist studies, which sees religious affiliation as one more aspect of identity that feminism needs to take into account in its handling of the specificities of a woman's experience. As we will discuss further in this chapter, however, the integration of the study of religion to gender studies goes beyond the mere adding of another identity marker, such as the 'religious woman' (like race/ethnicity, class, ableness, or sexual orientation), to the mix of an intersectional analysis.

In this introduction, we will discuss how the particularities of the historical moment in which feminist studies address religion have several implications for the field of study. The aim is to readdress the relationship between feminist studies and studies of religion in different ways, notably by linking different theoretical veins and offering retrospectives on the evolution of the field.

Double Blindness and Continuities

In this volume we have gathered a group of scholars who research gender and religion with a focus on contemporary Europe. Our contribution seeks to highlight the significance of gender as empirical reality in the multiple expressions and formations of religion in contemporary society as well as a critical theoretical perspective working across disciplines. Our research group reflects the current need for interdisciplinary dialogue at a time when boundaries between disciplines and established theoretical approaches in both gender and religion are being challenged. The following disciplines are represented in this collection: anthropology, gender studies, history of religions, human geography, history, sociology, and theology.

In addressing the current encounter between feminist studies and studies of religion, we wish to readdress attention to the so-called double blindness in this area of research (King 2005). Until recently, the relationship between the study of gender and the study of religion has been marked by the blindness of one field to the other: a lack of interest in religion on the part of gender studies and the absence of gender perspectives in the study of religion. The effects and legacies of this double blindness, which will be further discussed below, also shape our encounters in the present moment.

In the following, we will link some of the issues that are important for the study of gender and religion to these contemporary debates while emphasizing continuities wherever relevant (see Dubisch; Vuola; Utriainen, this volume).

'The Religious Woman': A Return from the Margins

Feminist studies' lack of interest in the study of religion has been manifested in many ways, for instance in its absence as a theme for discussion at conferences and in feminist journals.[2] Although this absence is now being addressed as feminist studies engage with the post-secular turn in the academy, the location of feminist studies of religion within a feminist academy is far from self-evident. Therefore, it is relevant to repeat the reasons why feminist studies should show an interest in religion, or, from the perspective of scholars of gender and religion, why it would be more appropriate to ask how feminist studies in the first place have been able to shut their eyes to religious realities, a question equally relevant even before religion became a 'hot topic' in the academy. The reasons are both simple

and varied: the majority of the world's women practice some form of religion; therefore, feminism's blindness to this fact must be seen as one more way in which Western feminism excludes perspectives important to non-Western women, a key concern within current feminist theory. On the other hand, if religion, as feminist theory has argued, is one of the most powerful ideological tools that underpins patriarchal normative views of gender and sexuality, it should be given due critical attention. These are two of the primary reasons, but before taking a closer look at the current shift in which feminism dons the veil and enters the worlds of religion, so to speak, we need to look at the ideas that prompted the earlier study of gender and religion.

Until the 1980s the view of religion, as presented in religious studies, social anthropology, and the sociology of religion, was still one in which women were largely invisible and a gender perspective was completely absent. From the 1980s, and most notably in the 1990s, a growing number of feminist scholars pointed out that this neglect had led to serious distortions in the understanding of religion. Due to the earlier neglect of women, a range of studies focused on interpreting women's involvement in different religious systems with the result that new theoretical frameworks evolved (e.g. Holden 1983; Bynum et al. 1986; Falk and Gross 1989; King 1995a). The feminist studies of gender and religion carried out in the 1980s and 1990s had to deconstruct the misogynistic symbolic language identified in various religious traditions of the world. Simultaneously, however, an equally important theoretical project was launched: to explore the many ways in which women actively created their own religious lives. A focus on women as religious actors grew in response to the predominant view that religious women were passive victims of religious ideologies, an approach in which the distinction between Woman as symbol and women as religious actors proved to be important (Sered 1999). The presence of Woman as symbol in cross-cultural religious systems, often understood in negative terms, had stood in the way of understanding real women's involvement in religion. When making women's active role in religion visible, perspectives developed that changed both the view of 'the religious woman' and the way the particular religious traditions under study were conceived and theorized (e.g. Bynum 1986; Dubisch 1983, 1991, 1995; Sered 1992, 1994). It is instructive to look at how these ideas were articulated in Jill Dubisch's influential interpretation of Greek women's religious lives.

Ethnographic studies of Greece carried out in the 1960s and 1970s were important in shaping the analytical framework used to interpret Mediterranean cultures in terms of honor and shame. In the 1980s the model of honor and shame was subject to a massive critique in which feminist anthropology played a major role. Although the discussion did not address religion directly, the cultural construction of honor and shame was widely accepted as resting on the worldview and understanding of gender and sexuality advocated by the major religious traditions of the region, namely Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, and Islam. The code of honor and shame implicates the idea that '[w]omen are weaker, more prone to sin, bearing the burden for the destructive power of sexuality' (Dubisch 1995, 197).

Dubisch's study of Greek women's devotion to the Virgin Mary, the Panayía, questions this prevalent negative image of women. At the center of her study is the female pilgrim crawling on her knees up to the Greek national Marian shrine in Tinos. In the eyes of Western feminism, these women seem to represent the very stereotype of 'the religious woman' subordinated to a patriarchal religion. Contrary to such a view, Dubisch argues that the act of crawling can be seen as a dramatic performance of womanhood, of 'being good at being a woman' (1995, 209). The suffering and emotion on display express the burdens and the struggle that Greek women as mothers and wives are willing to take on in order to secure the well-being of their families. Dubisch stresses that these performances cannot be seen as marginal to Greek religion, for they are played out in a public place at the center of Greek culture and are integral to its religious tradition. Greek women's religious life cannot be seen as muted participation in a male-controlled institution, as earlier studies suggested. Women's religious performances involve a creative expression of self that Dubisch terms a 'poetics of womanhood' (1995, 208–212).

In this study, then, we find some of the major themes in the study of gender and religion as it has evolved during the last decades. Out of the focus on women grew an emphasis on women as religious actors, closely related to issues of power, such as the power to express oneself religiously, strivings for religious authority and expertise, as well as the power of formal office.

In the current shift in feminist theory in which religion as an academic topic is being readdressed, it is not the Christian religious woman in Europe that is located at the center of attention, but the more visible and identifiable veiled Muslim women. While Muslim women have attracted huge

scholarly attention, we wish to highlight how the current discussions have continuity with familiar themes in the field of religion and gender. The image of the 'religious woman' as a passive receiver of a patriarchal ideology, widespread in public debate and academic writing, has been critically responded to by scholars of gender and religion through an emphasis on Muslim women's agency. At the center of this debate has been the work of Saba Mahmood (2005, 2006), which is of particular interest to the aims of this book as her argument is launched as a critique of the feminist take on the subject of gender and religion that we have just outlined. In her now well-known work on Muslim women's participation in the Islamic revival in Egypt, she acknowledges that the aforementioned approach has been productive in 'complicating the oppressor/oppressed model of gender relations' (Mahmood 2006, 38). Nevertheless, she holds that the framework 'not only remains encumbered by the binary terms of resistance and subordination, but is also insufficiently attentive to motivations, desires and goals that are not necessarily captured by these terms' (Mahmood 2006, 38). Mahmood criticizes a tendency in feminist research to look for expressions of resistance that may challenge male domination even in instances when an explicitly *feminist* agency is difficult to locate. Instead, she argues for uncoupling the notion of agency from that of resistance and directing our attention to the many ways in which norms are inhabited.[3] Mahmood's argument is developed as a critique of Judith Butler's writings on the formation of subjectivity, gender, and power, which are core texts in feminist theory, and thus suggests that there is a fundamentally problematic relation between feminist studies and studies of religion. Since the aim of this book is to contribute to a fruitful relation between these two fields, it is particularly relevant to take a closer look at this contention.

Firstly, Mahmood's argument relates directly to the issue of double blindness discussed above. As scholars of religion, we certainly recognize her description of feminist studies' lack of interest in exploring women's religious lives. Mahmood recounts how colleagues at numerous seminars in which she presented her study of the mosque movement never asked about the significance of the veil other than in terms of what it means for issues of power and resistance (2006, 58). The authors of this chapter can relate to many similar experiences. We do not fully agree with Mahmood's critique of earlier studies of gender and religion, however. We suggest that the portrayal of women's religious practices in this field of study has not been as imprisoned in the 'resistance–subordination' model as she claims it is; on the contrary, an exploration of the motivations, desires,

and goals that goes beyond this model has been a key concern within the field. Dubisch's analysis of Greek women fulfilling their vows to the Virgin Mary is one example of this. Although a principal aim of her analysis is to reject the one-sided interpretation of Greek women as culturally subordinated within the model of honor and shame, the analysis cannot be reduced to being only, or even primarily, about 'resistance'. The creative use of the religious symbols and rituals in the Greek Orthodox tradition that the women in Dubisch's study engage in could perfectly well be described with a notion of agency uncoupled from resistance and linked to the motives, desires, and goals embedded in a broader social context constructing femininity in Greek society. Greek women's religious performances of 'being good at being women' could be said to constitute ways of inhabiting norms about femininity and religion, that is, ways that allow them to create their 'poetics of womanhood'. Mahmood brings the tension between her own work and feminist theory to our attention, a tension that is also present between Dubisch's study and feminism. In fact, in Dubisch's study she recounts an experience similar to Mahmood's regarding a feminist response to her presentation of Greek women's religious experiences. When presenting the study in a seminar, feminist colleagues asked if the Greek women's adoption of suffering as a cultural idiom did not indicate an exploitation of women in Greek society.[4] In other words, they queried about the subordination–resistance model that they found was circumvented in the study. Dubisch's answer to this question is very similar to Mahmood's message to feminist colleagues, although the cultural contexts of their studies are quite different. Women crawling on their knees to a religious shrine cannot be seen as direct evidence that they are unhappy or oppressed, writes Dubisch. The act of crawling on one's knees is culturally determined and derives its meaning from a larger system of cultural values. In order to convey an understanding of this ritual act, the anthropologist needs to place it within this larger system of cultural meaning, and in so doing the women do not appear as passive receivers of cultural and religious meaning, but as cocreators or, indeed, as agents (Dubisch 1995, 223–226).

Our aim here is to point out that understanding women's religious agency outside a simple frame of oppressor–oppressed is not new in the field of gender and religion. Rather, the current discussion is a variation on themes that have been taken up before, as exemplified here with Dubisch's work but not limited to her (e.g. Sered 1992; Gemzöe 2000, 2005).[5] The juxtaposition of Dubisch's and Mahmood's studies also reveals

common and implicit assumptions that frame the academic discussion. The similarity between the lines of argument that both anthropologists adopt is not surprising: interpreting a certain performance or practice within its cultural context is an approach usually adopted in anthropology of religion or any other subject matter. The underlying tension is the often implicit comparison with Euro-American culture in the feminist analytical frame. If Western feminism were to see Muslim women's veiling in the Egyptian mosque movement as simply subordination, it would clearly distort its understanding of what the movement is about. Moreover, it would involve an implicit judgment of Muslim women as 'less liberated' than, say, American women. Postcolonial feminist theory has forcefully demonstrated that such a comparative exercise represents a theoretical oversimplification and a perpetuation of inherent power relations between the global North and South and different groups of women. The feminist political and analytical task must be to reject such attempts to measure 'other' cultures in relation to the supposedly neutral and superior gender relations in Euro-American culture. Instead, scholars must aim at disentangling the ways in which gender relations are embedded in a web of other power relations without losing sight of the similarities between the workings of gendered power across national and cultural boundaries (see Mohanty 2003).

It is important to note that the problematics involved in the Euro-American feminist tradition of analyzing gender inequalities in different cultures does not surface only when the 'other' culture is placed outside Europe or America. The notion of judgment is also present in the feminist discussion of Dubisch's study, something that points to a further parallel with Mahmood's contribution. In her response to her feminist critics in a seminar at an American university, Dubisch points out that Greek women, although displaying suffering in public, do not necessarily suffer more than American women—something that had been tacitly assumed in the feminist critique and which involved a normative judgment of Greek society (Dubisch 1995, 223–224).[6] The point in juxtaposing the two studies is that the similarities between their analyses and the feminist responses show how, in both cases, it is the image of 'the religious woman' and the assumptions it prompts that shape the encounter between feminist theory and the study of religion. It is the powerful symbol of 'a woman subdued by patriarchy' that hinders an understanding of real women's religious lives, be it Muslim, Greek Orthodox, or of any other religious orientation.

If we read Mahmood's argument primarily as an objection to feminist theory's blindness to the motivations and desires involved in women's

religious engagements and to the shortcomings of the simple analytical frame of power and resistance to interpret these religious worlds, it can be connected to feminist theory's lack of a response to studies of gender and religion. The shift in feminist theory constitutes a new openness to include an understanding of religious subjectivity and practice in its theoretical scope. There is a risk, however, that a one-sided focus on agency overshadows the many dimensions of power at work in religious contexts, limiting the analysis to the level of the individual 'religious woman' and the formation and expression of subjectivity.[7] We see it as crucial to the study of gender and religion to set any analysis of culturally determined forms of piety and religious devotion in analytical frames that ask questions about gendered relations of power not only at the individual level, but with respect to larger systems of cultural and religious values. Although single studies can choose different points of emphasis, we believe that studies in the field of gender and religion as a whole should keep *both* individual and systemic analytical perspectives alive. This might seem a truism to the feminist reader, but our emphasis of this point here is in recognition of the complexity of the task and the impossibility of separating a feminist scholarly analysis from its embeddedness in political realities.[8]

In this volume, we do not suggest any unified theoretical frame to analyze religious practices in relation to gender and power. We rather want to point to the varied approaches and interpretations elaborated in the field. The issue of how women's religious agency is related to cultural values and relations of power are highlighted in several contributions to this volume (e.g. Utriainen; Fedele and Knibbe; Maddrell), whereas the power of interrelated religious, political and academic discourses in framing gendered religious lives is given attention in other contributions (see e.g. Dubisch; Sauer; Keinänen; Page and Vuola). Collectively, the contributions manifest how the many dimensions of power in relation to gender and religion continue to be a central concern in the field of study (see further below on Linda Woodhead's approach). We would also like to stress that the elaboration of theoretical tools that will serve analyses across cultures and religions needs to be the work of many scholars in cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Religion and Secularity: Contesting a Dichotomy

There are further interesting parallels between the discussions in Dubisch's and Mahmood's works. In both cases there are underlying assumptions that presuppose a deep cleavage between modern/secular societies on the

one hand and traditional/religious societies on the other. This assumed fundamental difference between social formations has been at the heart of the discourse differentiating Muslim societies from Western democracies in the so-called 'clash of civilizations' discourse, but it is certainly present within Christian Europe as well. If feminists in northwestern Europe see religious women crawling on their knees at Marian shrines as the epitome of female submission to patriarchal structures, such a standpoint is part of a set of wider assumptions distinguishing Catholic or Orthodox cultures in southern and eastern Europe as different and less modern, less progressive, and less civilized than Protestant/secular northwestern Europe. That these assumptions are tied to unequal power relations ultimately based on economic power *within* Europe is clearly manifested in the ongoing battle about the future of Greece played out between the Greek nation and the European Union (summer 2015). In the political debate, Greece's 'difference' in relation to the more economically and politically powerful nations in Europe has been understood as a lack of modernity and rationality on the side of the Greeks, indeed as a 'clash of civilizations'. These events provide a further context in which feminist discourses of Greek women's religiousness can be located.

The post-secular turn in the academy has brought about a thorough questioning and deconstruction of the dualistic understanding of tradition/religion and modernity/secularity, which is a theoretical enterprise with far-reaching implications for the understanding of religion in Europe. To feminist theory, generally critical of unyielding dichotomies, this theoretical turn offers major challenges that are now being responded to in various ways (Mahmood 2005; Braidotti 2008; Butler 2009). A major issue to be explored is Western feminism's own strong identification with a political and theoretical tradition defining itself as secular and opposed to religion, a circumstance that lies behind feminism's apparent difficulties in incorporating an understanding of religion in its theory and politics (see Najmabadi 2008).

At the heart of the current theoretical shift is the questioning of the secularization thesis. The critics of this thesis attack the theory from different vantage points (e.g. Casanova 1994; Asad 2003; Martin 2005). A common point is the rejection of an assumed linear development valid for all societies, which progresses from traditional/hierarchical/religious to progressive/modern/democratic—an idea not even applicable to the USA and Europe, where it should supposedly be manifested in its clearest form. Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly, the current critique of secularization theories has revealed how the idea of a univer-

sal category of 'secularism' that can be distinguished from 'religion' in fact represents a particular understanding of the secular/religious dualism based on a certain version of Protestantism. Therefore, the concept of secularity has to be deconstructed in favor of an analytical project that scrutinizes how religion and secularism are constructed in relation to one another as historically situated practices (see Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008 for various examples) and the implications of this interrelationality for current enquiry. This requires the scholar to take a close look at the specific and local ways in which religion as belief, experience, practice, or institution operates in any given context.

Besides providing the basis for the secular/religious dichotomy, the secularization narrative offers a specific view of time in its suggestion that the historical development of any society consists of passing from a religious state to secularity and modernity. Such an understanding of time and history is built into Euro-American feminism's self-understanding and theoretical foundation as part of a wider Enlightenment discourse. The challenge to these fundaments will involve an array of reformulations for feminist theory. An urgent and highly significant task is the reassessment of the place of religious feminism in the history of feminism, as well as in the feminist movements of today. This theoretical undertaking involves unmasking feminism's blindness not only to women's religious lives, but to its own history (see Hammar 1999; Braidotti 2008; Sands 2008; Vuola, this volume).

The contributions to this volume present various interventions in this debate. As the Muslim woman bears the stigma of 'the religious woman' in Europe (Sauer, this volume), the identification of the secular with equality shapes how diverse religious subjectivities are formed in European countries today (see Page and Thomas, this volume). Vuola (this volume) directs our attention to 'religion' inside the academy in a discussion of how the place of theology as an academic discipline is related to theoretical blindness to religion.

Gender and the Theorization of Religion

We now turn to the other side of the relationship of double blindness, that is, to the study of religion, asking why feminist/gender theory is crucial in the academic study of religion today. The contributions to this volume give multiple answers to this question. Firstly, we will point to three interrelated theoretical themes that have been important in the first phases

of feminist interventions in the study of religion and to which the chapters of this volume speak in various ways. These are *religion as practice*, *the relationship between religious practice and religion as prescribed by formal religious institutions*, and the *feminization of religion* in Europe.

Religion as Practice

A strong common theme in this book is a focus on religion as it is practiced, an approach that has been crucial to the formation of a feminist tradition in the study of religion. Because of the earlier scholarly predilection for the study of textual and doctrinal traditions of male-dominated religious institutions, the areas of religious life occupied by women, often outside religious institutions, remained invisible. The discovery of women's great involvement in patriarchal and misogynic religions was quite perplexing since the interpreters sought to explain women's religious practice from a normative, doctrinal perspective. Only by shifting perspectives and turning scholarly attention to the level of practice, to ritual, and to religion as an everyday activity could women's 'unspoken worlds of religion'—as the title of one of the early women's studies volumes had it (Falk and Gross 1989)—become both visible and a valuable object of study. The shift from the study of 'religion as prescribed' to 'religion as practiced' in women's (and men's) everyday lives was a prerequisite for a broader gender-informed understanding of religion. It opened up conventional definitions of religion and the understandings of power mechanisms in religious contexts for a feminist critique.

In recent decades, a practice-oriented approach has gained ground in the study of religion generally. In making hidden dimensions of religion visible, the feminist tradition has contributed substantially to this general shift. A focus on religious practice is now seen as necessary for an understanding of the rapidly changing religious landscape of today. For instance, sociologists of religion hold that a focus on religion as it is lived is crucial for an understanding of how 'institutionally diffuse' religions and new spiritualities operate in present-day society (Berger 2007; Ammerman 2007; Woodhead 2007a; McGuire 2008), reflecting a broader turn to the 'everyday' in the social sciences. This qualitative turn in the study of religion, owes much to feminist methodologies and has resulted from an emphasis on faith as a lived experience and the expressive and performative aspects of religious life in which gendered dimensions are crucial.

The two scholars that open and close this volume have contributed to this shift, each approaching the issue of practice from her respective disciplinary angle. Both of them have critiqued conventional approaches that have been used to study religious practice from the normative and androcentric perspective of the church, rendering vernacular women-dominated practices as a deviation from this norm, as insignificant, or simply as 'not religion'. Jill Dubisch (1991) has called for a 'deconstruction' of the very notion of religion, which, in its androcentric conceptualization, came to obscure women's religious agency in various ways (Dubisch 1991, 43–44; also see Dubisch, this volume). Approaching the field from a sociological perspective, Linda Woodhead has brought attention to similar tendencies in the sociology of religion. According to her, both Christian and androcentric norms have steered the sociological study of religion and new spiritualities, the latter often being perceived as new folk religion. She argues that it has been 'the most androcentric—male-led and male-defined—aspects of Christianity' that have shaped the 'sociological presuppositions about what counts as "real" religion'. In other words, male practice has been seen as normative in the study of religion and new spiritualities (Woodhead 2007a, 580–581).

Thus, the shift to religion as practice brings attention to the need of elaborating the concepts applied in analyzing religion in different social contexts. Practice-orientated scholars of religion, often with a focus on gender, have found that conventional scholarly definitions of religion are deeply entrenched in Christian presuppositions, since they assume Christian traditions (largely in its Protestant strand) as a norm. The terms 'folk religion' and 'popular religion', which have commonly been used to designate popular practices, have constituted the traditions of others, for example, the peasantry or uneducated masses, which, in one way or another, deviated from the Christian norm and therefore did not qualify as religion proper (Orsi 1985; Primiano 1995; McGuire 2008). However, the feminist critique has shown the androcentric bias in the usage of central concepts in this context. In her outline of the study of popular religion, Ursula King found that women as religious actors fell outside 'the folk,' 'the common people,' and 'the peasants' (King 1995b, 237–238). Women's exclusion was thereby twofold: first, from the sphere of religion and, second, from the category of 'folk'.

The problematic terms 'folk' and 'popular' religion have gradually been replaced by new labels such as everyday religion, lived religion, or vernacular religion, depending on the disciplinary home of the scholar. Although

these terms are not interchangeable, they all tend to privilege religion as it is practiced by ordinary people in their everyday lives. Meredith B. McGuire sees the term 'lived religion' as a useful way 'for distinguishing the actual experience of religious persons from the prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs and practices' (McGuire 2008, 12).

The Relationship between Two Levels

A shift from studying what has been called official religion and orthodoxy to the study of local practices inevitably leads to the theoretical (and methodological) issue of how the relationship between the two spheres should be understood. The two-tier model of official and popular religion has been criticized for its rigidness, dualistic nature, and privileging of the institutional sphere (Badone 1990, 4–6). An approach that sees the two levels as coproducing and mutually influential, by emphasizing the blurred boundaries between the two, has been favored in anthropological studies of religion (Wolf 1984; Badone 1990).

In a similar vein, Woodhead has elaborated the terms 'strategic' and 'tactical' religion to study the interplay and dynamics of power between the two spheres. The former is comparable to what has been traditionally called 'religion as prescribed' by institutions dominated by men who seek to impose their power over others through control of religious teachings, offices, sacred objects, and places. Tactical forms of religion do not explicitly seek to undermine this order, but they facilitate women's cultivation of their own ideas and the furthering of their interests at the strategic religion's interstices (Woodhead 2007a, 9, 14–15; Woodhead 2014, 15–17). Susan Starr Sered's notion of the 'domestication of religion' describes the process by which women convert 'male-oriented symbols and rituals to a female-oriented belief system'. This implies that women 'reinterpret, ignore, borrow, circumvent, and shift emphases' in the dominating religious traditions in a way that better agrees with their self-definition, specific experiences, and concerns as women (Sered 1992, 10, 87). As Gemzöe's study on Portuguese women shows, however, women can, within certain limits, challenge the prevailing religious and social order (Gemzöe 2000, 2011). These women defied the priests' authority over them *as women* and sought actively to expand their sphere of activity and influence within the church by outdoing the clergy in certain religious performances. Gemzöe interprets this partly as a consequence of the Portuguese women's predominance in religious practices, and argues

that the feminization of religion may entail an elaboration of 'religious knowledge and expertise, sometimes manifested in recognized religious authority' (Gemzöe 2000, 246–247; 2011).

The authors in this volume shed new light on the interplay of strategic and tactical religion. Avril Maddrell illustrates how women in Malta are the leaders and teachers of Marian devotion, gaining authority through their ritual expertise and personal relations to the Madonna, as well as through how the assumptions about the dichotomy between the transcendent work of a male priesthood and the immanent work of a female support staff is challenged by the emotional and spiritual labor of the latter in the day-to-day tasks of shrine management. Notermans, Turolla, and Jansen show that the Catholic West African women in their study, even though navigating within institutionally defined domains, are not passive consumers of strategic religion, but actively pursuing their own agendas. Terhi Utriainen's study further points to the complexities in understanding the dynamics between the strategic and tactic dimensions of religion. In her chapter, angel practices can be seen as 'a democratic, women-friendly religion' that provides women with agency and acts as a way of 'updating Christianity to better suit the modern world', but also as 'a new form of regulating women's lives' (this volume).

The Feminization of Religion

The feminization of religion, that is, women's numerical predominance in religious practices, has been well documented in Christian churches and practices generally as well as in the context of alternative spiritualities in Europe (see Keinänen; Gemzöe, this volume). However, even though the feminization of religion is more or less taken for granted, it constitutes an unexplored and under-theorized phenomenon posing several challenges to the study of present-day religion in Europe.

The established knowledge on the feminization of religion in Europe also poses a challenge to grand theories, such as the secularization theory. Scholars of gender and religion have pointed to the urgent need of a gender-critical revision of the secularization thesis (e.g. Warne 2000; Woodhead 2008; Aune et al. 2008). Traditional theories of secularization have in fact only described men's disaffiliation from religion, whereas women who continued their religious practices were excluded from this narrative. Thus, taking gender (and power) into account in secularization studies helps us to 'modify and strengthen existing theories of