

Téma: Náboženství v genderové diskusi

*"To put it schematically: "women" is historically, discursively constructed, and always relative to other categories which themselves change; "women" is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned.... The history of feminism has also been a struggle against over-zealous identifications; and feminism must negotiate the quicksands of "women" which will not allow it to settle on either identities or counter-identities, but which condemn it to an incessant striving for a brief foothold.... Can anyone fully inhabit a gender without a degree of horror?*

*Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Although scholars in the human sciences might try to fix their reference, the terms religion and religions do not belong solely to the academy. Outside of the academic arena, these terms have been taken up and mobilized in conflicts over legal recognition and political empowerment. They have been entangled in ... historical struggles of possession and dispossession, inclusion and exclusion, domination and resistance."*

**W**omen' is historically, discursively constructed, and always relative to other categories which themselves change," Denise Riley observes. Perhaps no one should be more aware of the persuasiveness of this claim than the feminist student of religious traditions - traditions that are themselves often deeply implicated in the historical and discursive construction of "women" as a category. Gender, Joan Scott argues, is simultaneously the interpretation of perceived sexual difference and a primary means for talking about power. This definition resounds profoundly for those who think about religious discourses and practices. As soon as the divine is analogized to the human realm, gender emerges as a problem of both difference and power. Once that analogy has been mobilized, the two realms seem to oscillate endlessly back and forth, each reflecting and reinscribing the other's claims. Meanwhile, "religion" is, as David Chidester ably demonstrates in his study of colonialist contexts such as southern Africa, a non-innocent category. Critical feminist readers will no doubt recognize stark parallels between the colonial situation and other political arenas in which the organization of human social life is thoroughly framed by the power to define and to name.

Each of these terms-women, gender, and religion-is inherently unstable. None of them is tied in an unproblematic way to an easily discerned, identified, or fixed object. Any attempt to fix their meanings is tied to complicated political, institutional, and material interests. Each term represents, in other words, a powerfully "troubled" category. This book brings together a wide range of attempts to examine the places where these terms overlap; at the same time, it keeps the provisional status of each of these terms in plain view.

This book comes into being more or less a quarter-century after the first feminist incursions into the academic study of religion, incursions that were part of a broader intellectual and activist movement to generate a field of academic inquiry that has been

widely institutionalized as "women's studies." To be sure, feminists and women intellectuals/activists/practitioners have most certainly done battle with religious traditions and institutions for much longer than a quarter-century, as historical evidence stretching back into premodern settings can amply attest.<sup>6</sup> But the impact of feminist studies upon the academic study of religion has a shorter history, one that has certain things in common with women's studies as a whole and that diverges in other ways under the influence of the particular circumstances of the academic study of religion. Feminist work on religion has participated in the multiform strategies taken up by feminist studies as a whole: historical recovery and reconstruction, imaginative reconstitution of traditions and practices, and ideological critique.

But feminist studies in religion have also had their own trajectories that distinguish them from both women's and gender studies on the one hand and traditional religious studies on the other. In some cases, feminist studies in religion have amplified the attention these fields have focused on a particular problem. For example, where there have been tensions in feminist studies in religion, these have often resided at the border between "insiders" and "outsiders," raising the question of who has authority to speak about and critique religious traditions and institutions—and whose perspective bears the greater authority. Although these kinds of questions have also troubled religious studies and women's/gender studies as fields, they have been articulated most trenchantly in feminist studies in religion.

Moreover, feminist studies of religion have brought to women's/gender studies a serious yet salutary challenge. If "women" has long been recognized as too abstract a category to be useful for analysis, "religion" has rarely been included in the litany of qualifiers ("race, class, culture, ethnicity/nationality, sexuality") by which "women" becomes an ever-more marked and differentiated category. Yet feminist scholars who intervene in the academic study of religion have often drawn our attention to the complicated role that religion has played in identity formations, social relations, and power structures. "Religion" as a category often cuts across the other categories by which identities are framed (gender, race, class, etc.), and it often complicates these other categories rather than simply reinscribing them.

It has been an obstacle to some conversations that many feminists, whether activists or academics, have tended to read "religion" as an abstraction solely in negative terms—reading "religion" only as a form of constraint both ideologically and institutionally, and reading the embrace of religious affiliations or allegiances primarily as a sign of false consciousness. This negative rendering of "religion" is in many respects an ironic holdover from feminism's own Enlightenment inheritance. During the Enlightenment, "reason" dethroned "dogma" and became the new sovereign. Ever since this revolution in thinking, two related problems have troubled intellectual life. "Religion," on the one hand, was produced as a category separate from other elements of human social existence (like "society" itself). On the other hand, the binary opposition "secular/religious" imposed itself upon the collective consciousness of the West, especially upon Western intellectuals anxious to carve up the disciplinary turf according to highly rationalized impulses. The ongoing legacy of these two effects is still being lived out in struggles over the borderlands that attempt to keep these two purported opposites (religion/secularism) in their places. As the work of many of the contributors to this volume will attest, "religion" does extremely complicated and quite varied work in human societies. It would be foolhardy simply to bracket religion as though it were easily separable from other aspects of social life or indeed to dismiss serious engagement with religion as mere false consciousness.

"Gender" as an analytical category has added complexity to the discussion in feminist studies, both in religious studies and beyond it. Fifteen years ago, an important (now out-of-print) anthology entitled *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* argued that feminist scholarship had demonstrated the distinctly partial character of the subject of comparative religion, homo religiosus. The authors whose work is collected in that book "insist upon the feminist insight that all human beings are 'gendered'-that is, that there is no such thing as generic homo religiosus." Four years after the appearance of this volume, Ursula King organized a panel on "Religion and Gender" at the Sixteenth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions in Rome (September 3-8, 1990). A majority of the participants in this three-day-long event revised their papers for publication in a volume edited by King that appeared five years later under the same title and organized broadly around "Theoretical Reflections" and "Empirical Investigations." In a relatively short amount of time, a radical paradigm shift for the academic study of religion as a whole had been charted.

This paradigm shift chronologically parallels another series of debates in the field of the academic study of religion highlighting the degree to which "religion" is far from an innocent or neutral category. Perhaps more importantly, this series of debates has put forward two serious critiques. First, it has demonstrated how the category of "religion" has been problematically detached from the specific historical contexts, social frameworks, political struggles, and institutional constraints that have produced it-as both a category for analysis and an object for study. Second, it has interrogated how this detachment has taken place-most notably through a universalizing rhetoric that attempts to mask the conditions by which "religion" is produced for study. These scholarly discussions have tended not to bring gender explicitly into view (with a few notable exceptions), and the challenge remains for the subdiscipline of theory and method in the study of religion to take seriously feminist and critical gender studies. At the same time, feminist ideological critique may have helped (alongside postcolonial criticism and critical race theory) to clear a space for precisely this sort of questioning-even as the subdiscipline of theory and method remains mostly resolutely focused on a Europeanist and masculinist tradition of philosophers and theorists of religion.

The current volume seeks to intervene in this complicated collection of theoretical debates. Rather than replicating the work done by other anthologies devoted generally to the topic of "women and religion," this book is organized around a series of pressing theoretical problematics and highlights the contributions that different disciplinary approaches can make to an understanding of these concerns. Each part of the book includes essays that treat specific examples of religious ideology or religious practice but that also illuminate a theoretical problem-either a problem for the academic study of religion or a problem for feminist theory and/or critical gender studies. Examples are drawn from textual traditions, fieldwork accounts, activism within and outside of religious institutions and communities, and the interstices of "religion" and other aspects of social life. Frequently, one essay in the volume can be read with or against another, so that the multiple characters of religion and feminism or gender activism can come into view. The book is not organized into a monolithic genetic or teleological narrative. Every essay challenges the received wisdom so that all of the terms of analysis remain open to interrogation. Taken together, these essays raise a series of critical questions about how "gender," "feminism," and "religion" many times operate as unproblematized categories of analysis-and remind readers of how important keeping these categories troubled can be. In addition, the essays collected in this book call attention to a wide range of other cognate forms of difference-class, race, colonial status, sexuality, among others-and read them with and against gender and religion. The book itself

is organized into five parts: "Categories of Analysis and Critique: 'Gender,' 'Religion,' and 'Feminism' "; "Origins, Identities, and Appropriations"; "Gender and Religious Experience: Interdisciplinary Approaches"; "Gender, Religion, and Body Politics"; and "Gender and Religion in the Politics of the Academy."

Part I of this book, "Categories of Analysis and Critique: 'Gender,' 'Religion,' and 'Feminism,' "is concerned specifically with the theoretical apparatus of "feminist studies" and "gender studies" of "religion." The book opens with an important exchange between Miriam Peskowitz and Carol Christ that does two things: it offers access to a part of the ongoing debate within feminist and gender studies in religion at the same time that it reminds readers that feminists are by no means monolithic in either their approaches to the study of religion or their investments in their work. Peskowitz's first short essay ("What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means") was delivered as part of a panel at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in 1994 celebrating the tenth anniversary of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. Writing and speaking as a Jewish feminist, Peskowitz asks about the variations in the usage of terms such as gender, sex, sexuality, and religion and then goes on to consider the historical genealogy of a metaphor that has been central for many feminist interpreters of religion the metaphor of "weaving." Against the backdrop of a widespread feminist embrace of this metaphor for women/femininity /femaleness, Peskowitz cautions that such an embrace may mask less salutary ideological and material realities and may efface and foreclose other feminist critical questions. In her response to Peskowitz ("Weaving the Fabric of Our Lives"), Carol Christ questions Peskowitz's ostensible privileging of male writers and argues, "I do not believe that the negative use of an image in androcentric literary tradition should become the last word for feminists." Christ turns her attention to the image of weaving in feminist writing and to the history of women working as weavers. Drawing upon her own experience within goddess spirituality and contemporary Greek culture, Christ argues for maintaining the metaphor of weaving as a way of connecting contemporary practice with a continuous history of women. Peskowitz's response to Christ's intervention ("Unweaving: A Response to Carol P. Christ") observes that there are important points of difference in viewpoint between herself and Christ. She raises a series of questions about the impact of privileging one particular metaphor drawing upon a single aspect of women's worldly activity when "women have done and do all sorts of things." She offers counter-readings of several of the anecdotes Christ includes in her response and closes not with a resolution, but with the recognition that "the differences between us are in some ways paradigmatic of current debates among feminists who study religion." Christ's "Reweaving" has not appeared in print before, and it provides a critical response to Peskowitz's reading of Christ's earlier intervention. Here, Christ glosses her earlier account of her experiences in Greece as they have become a ground for her work on ancient religious traditions as resources for contemporary belief and practice, and she challenges Peskowitz's assessments of her work as occasions of, among other things, universalism and essentialism. Together, this strong exchange between two important feminist scholars in religion provides a complex portrait of some of the stakes involved in the methodological and theoretical debates within the field.

In the next chapter, " 'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word," historian of science and feminist theorist Donna Haraway explores the history, politics, and discursive range of the term gender. Haraway begins with a brief discussion of the problems of language and translation (since the ostensible occasion for the writing of this essay was an invitation to write an entry for a German-language translation of a French dictionary of Marxism), and with a wry reflection on "how problematic an entry on any

'keyword' must be." She opens her discussion of the term itself with an etymological analysis that quickly moves beyond the constraints of the lexical and the philological-and into the realms of the historical, the cultural, and the political. Organizing her history of the term in relation to the writings of Marx and Engels, she divides this section into several subsections along several organizing themes: "the gender identity paradigm," "the sex-gender system," and the emergence of "race" as a category of critical analysis. The essay closes with reflections on "gender" as a signifier for "difference" and the observation that "the refusal to become or to remain a 'gendered' man or woman ... is an eminently political insistence on emerging from the nightmare of the all-too real, imaginary narrative of sex and race."

In the next essay, "The Translation of Cultures: Engendering Yorubi Language, Orature, and World-Sense," Oyer6nk~ Oyewumi uses the example of Yorubi religion to problematize the universalizing tendencies of Western feminism-especially as they are manifest in the category of "gender" itself. This essay applies this general critique by working through a counter-example in which language (both specific terms and more general grammatical structures-like gender), epistemology, and lived social and cultural reality demand a much more nuanced and modulated form of translation than has been applied to Yorubi culture. Calling Yorubi "a genderless language in a genderful world" and observing the un examined Western assumption that bodies are always discerned as gendered, Oyewumi shows how these two insights together allow for misapprehensions about Yorubi religion by Western scholars, whether feminist or not, to come into view. From here, she raises broader questions about the impact of Western universalizing categories of thought, not just in scholarship but in broader social and political institutions (the United Nations coming under particular scrutiny here). Concluding her essay, she writes, "The present [discussion] has cleared the way for asking first-order, foundational questions about gender and difference in Yorubi society. It has shown that our interest in gender in Yorubiland cannot be divorced from the West's domination of both the constitution of the academy/scholarship and the sociopolitical and economic world spheres. Ultimately, this study raises the question of whether it is possible to have independent research questions and interests given the Western origins of most disciplines and the continued Western dominance of the world, for now."

This critique of the insular character of the category of "gender" is followed by a different kind of critique offered by historian of American religion Robert Orsi in his essay, "Snakes Alive: Resituating the Moral in the Study of Religion." Orsi's essay opens with a difficult example, one that probes the complex questions of subjectivity, perspective, and value in the study of religion. A journalist, Dennis Covington, spent two years among Christian snake handlers in Georgia, and produced what Orsi calls "a compelling account" of this religious community in a book entitled *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia*. On his last night with the community, Covington "watches in horror as his photographer, a young woman well known by then to the handlers, is verbally assaulted-by a minister Covington has considered his spiritual father-for her usurpation of man's scripturally mandated role (as the community understood this). Covington rises to witness against this denial of spiritual equality to women, but he is silenced by his mentor." Another preacher, with a large snake draped over his shoulder, then begins to preach a "nasty, woman-hating sermon." Covington's account of this event and his own response to it emphasize its strangeness, and his deep involvement in the community is ruptured as he returns to the "normal" world he had occupied (as a New York Times reporter) prior to spending two years amidst the snake-handlers. Orsi's essay raises critical questions about how "otherness" is negotiated in the study of religion, and it does so

around a dramatic and troubling example concerning women's participation in religious life. The essay goes on to offer some alternative examples of encountering "the other" in the study of religion in which the writers risk their own subjectivity by opening themselves to "a revisioning of one's own story through the lens of the other openly engaged." The essay's embrace of such openness as well as of critical conversation in the work of moral inquiry makes an important methodological intervention early on in the volume. It challenges readers to think about questions of standpoint, objectivity, the boundaries between the knower and the known, and what ethically engaged investigation might require.

Like Orsi's article, Minoo Moallem's *"Transnationalism, Feminism, and Fundamentalism"* raises questions about identity and otherness in the study of gender and religion. Taking as her starting point the current climate of globalization and the paradoxical fragmentation of identities and identifications, Moallem observes that an intensified conflict over representations is under way around the globe. In this context, the categories of "feminism" and "fundamentalism" have emerged as opponents but also as competitors in the contest over identity in the globalized, postmodern framework. As Moallem puts it at the beginning of her essay, "Feminisms and fundamentalisms are now competing global forces, both attempting to find means to control the mechanisms of cultural representation. Both feminism and fundamentalism are major factors responsible for and responding to the 'crisis of rationality' as well as the crisis of 'masculinity' and 'femininity.' Both arose inside the problematic of modernity as it deals with relations between men and women with respect to the universal and the particular, public and private, family and state, and individual and community." Examining how "Western egalitarian feminism" and "Islamic fundamentalism" have been set in opposition (through the more specific example of Iran), this essay seeks to undercut the colonialist dichotomy embedded in the opposition itself. The precise examples from the Iranian revolution—the masculinity of martyrdom and the femininity of the veil—show how gender has served the production of idealized Islamic identities that contend with the impositions of Westernized modernity. Yet, as Moallem demonstrates, in spite of its apparent rejection of modernity's subject formations, Islamic fundamentalism cannot help but be constituted as a mirror image of feminism. Meanwhile, feminism is also caught up in a reflective relationship with fundamentalism—each "takes pleasure in what is prohibited to" the other. Moallem warns that feminism must reconfigure itself in order to escape this double bind.

Part II, "Origins, Identities, and Appropriations," brings together a series of essays that raise questions about originary narratives, religious identities, and the politics of appropriation (whether for religious, political, or explicitly feminist ends). This section draws attention to the nostalgic pleasures and dangers involved in the search for origins—both in religion and in feminist critique. It also interrogates the political complexities involved in utopian appropriations of "other" religions by those in search of an easy escape from the patriarchal taint of received traditions.

Mieke Bal's "Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character" is a reading of the Genesis 1-3 narrative of Adam and Eve in the garden. Bal's interpretation of this foundational narrative has become a classic of feminist biblical scholarship. Using the interpretive tools of narratological analysis and psychoanalytic criticism along with the theoretical perspective of ideological critique, Bal provides a reading of the character of Eve that challenges both the traditional misogynist reading and the apologetic feminist reading of the text. This essay is included for several reasons: it explores the mythic and ideological production of gender in what is clearly one of the foundational texts of the West (Genesis); it is a good example of methodological sophistication in the application of literary theory to

religious texts in the service of an ideological critique; and it provides one of several examples in the reader of how "the body" is produced through religious or mythic discourse. Bal's essay simultaneously discusses a text that thematizes the problem of "origins" and performs an interpretation of this originary text that illuminates the complexity of attempts to appropriate such texts for projects of liberation.

The next essay in this discussion of origins and appropriations engages the ubiquity of sacrifice as part of religious practice and ideology, a ubiquity that has long presented a challenge to theoreticians of religion. How is it that the brutal shedding of blood should come to occupy center: "stage in religious dramas? Why does the blood of sacrificial victims possess such purifying potency? These are the questions that sociologist of religion Nancy Jay seeks to answer in her groundbreaking study of sacrifice, "Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman." Paying attention to gender, Jay notices that there is a striking "affinity between blood sacrificial religion and those social systems that make the relation between father and son the basis of social order and continuity." Focusing on ethnographic accounts of African societies, Jay traces out the patterns of social formation that link sacrificial practice to patrilineal social order. She then turns her attention to what she calls "the Judeo-Christian sacrificial social organization." She examines the story of Jacob's first sacrifice in Genesis 29-31, demonstrating how this story solves the problem of genealogy and descent in the narrative. She then goes on to consider the prohibition in the Catholic church against women serving as priests, observing the links between priesthood, eucharistic sacrifice, and apostolic succession. Women are excluded from ordination precisely in those Christian communities that maintain a strong sacrificial eucharistic theology. As she interprets this social and institutional reality, Jay observes: "Both sides of the controversy over women's ordination appear to share an understanding with sacrificing patrilineage members around the world: recognition of the power of sacrifice as a ritual instrument for establishing and maintaining an enduring male-dominated social order." Jay's discussion intervenes in a broad debate among theoreticians of religion concerning the origins and ongoing meanings of sacrifice. It also demonstrates beautifully the dramatic shift that occurs when "gender" is used as a critical category of analysis-rendering a mystifying and apparently arbitrary set of practices legible and intelligible.

Questions of religious identity take center stage in Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's " 'Shahbano,' " a case study involving a controversial and highly publicized Supreme Court decision' in India in 1985. Shahbano was a divorced Muslim woman to whom the court awarded financial maintenance (an amount equal to approximately \$14 per month) from her husband, who had sought to avoid such payment. Shahbano subsequently denounced the Court's award in a statement in which she asserted, "Since this judgment is contrary to the Quran and the hadith and is an open interference in Muslim personal law, I, Shahbano, being a muslim, reject it and dissociate myself from every judgment which is contrary to the Islamic Shariat." The political aftermath of the Court decision and Shahbano's response to it included the passage of a bill a year later called the "Muslim Women (Protection of Rights in Divorce) Act," a law whose ambiguous effects the essay explores. The case, as can be seen from this discussion, involved much more than a monthly payment from a man to his divorced wife. It came to stand for a wide range of conflicts between secular law and religious law, between Muslims and Hindus in India, and between different ideas about the subjectivity of "Shahbano," a figure who the authors of this essay argue served as a discursive cipher in a complex cultural, religious, and political struggle. How gender intersects with religious affiliations and class status complicates how this case might be understood and, indeed, how "Shahbano" might be interpreted. That the case

came to be the stage upon which a conflict between two groups of men seemed to be enacted—the stage on which male "protection" of female "victims" turned quickly to clichés, stereotypes, and paternalism. This essay raises questions of subjectivity and appropriation, of the relationship between "the religious" and "the secular," of the ways in which apparently progressive institutional gestures can have unexpected and changeable effects on those whose situations they seek to remedy. Shahbano's "inconstancy" is not, the authors argue, the product of a stereotypical feminine proclivity to changeability, but rather emerges out of the constraints experienced by "the female subaltern subject" who is "a palimpsest of identities, now constituted, now erased, by discursive displacements." Hence, Shahbano's name appears in quotation marks in the title of the essay to signal the deferrals and displacements of her subjectivity in the midst of these competing claims made upon her.

The problem of origins has repeatedly and recurrently troubled feminist interpreters of religious traditions. Scholars and activists have often turned to "antiquity" both as the place of origin—the historical locus of patriarchy's beginnings—and as the potential site of an alternative history—the place from which alternative religious and cultural forms might be retrieved. Contemporary goddess religions have often privileged the goddess traditions of other historical periods and cultural/geographical locations in their search for a useable past. In her essay, "A Question of Origins: Goddess Cults Greek and Modern," Greek historian and classicist Helene Foley responds to this interest in her discussion here of the work of two important contributors to the goddess movement, Starhawk and Carol Christ. Her essay has two main parts: the first part examines the theoretical underpinnings of the goddess religion movement; the second part looks at the ancient sources that have been mined by the goddess religions. As Foley puts it, her "project reveals not only significant misappropriation of ancient sources, but missed opportunities for a fuller understanding of the religious project in which spiritual feminism has engaged." This essay raises a whole series of important questions: What is at stake in the work of goddess feminism's attempts to retrieve a prehistorical mythic framework for contemporary religious life? What are the principles of selection at work in claiming a useable past from ancient sources? How does the appeal to "origins" function, and what are the potentially double-edged political payoffs of this utopian vision? Does the privileging of the traditionally feminine roles result in a restorative valorizing of what has been traditionally denigrated—or does it instead reinscribe traditional gender roles, albeit inverted in terms of the values assigned to them?

Laura Donaldson's "On Medicine Women and White Shame-ans: New Age Native Americanism and Commodity Fetishism as Pop Culture Feminism" picks up on some of the themes of the previous essay but with an additional political edge. New Age Native Americanism—or NANA, as Donaldson abbreviates it—"has emerged as a powerful catalyst for feminist transformation as non-Native women increasingly employ Indian traditions to escape the patriarchal biases of monotheistic religions and to become empowered, as well . as individuated." As Donaldson observes, this movement has connections with American self-help movements and emerges from a notion of feminist transformation that is concerned with the individual (rather than the social or the collective) and with therapeutic healing (rather than with political and social change). Focusing in on the remarkable cultural phenomena represented by popular works such as Lynn Andrews's *Jagtlar Woman* and Clarissa Pinkola Estes's *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, Donaldson diagnoses their effects as a combination of postmodern pastiche and commodity fetishism. Comparing this process of misappropriation and commodification of indigenous religious traditions and forms of knowledge to other dimensions of colonial "piracy," Donaldson recognizes that there are no courts or other institutions where such cultural borrowing can be challenged or contested.



"The only remedy, it seems, is a demystification of this movement and an exposure of its roots in the legacies of historical and neo-colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchal capitalism. As a person of Cherokee descent, I can only say that women persisting in a quest fulfilled at the expense of American Indians risk becoming nothing less than kidnappers who falsely claim feminist ideology and who join the rest of those benefiting from the plunders of imperialism in a New that is, postmodern neocolonial-Age."

Part III, "Gender and Religious Experience: Interdisciplinary Approaches," highlights the importance of interdisciplinarity in the study of gender and religion by focusing broadly on the idea of "religious experience" and examining how it might be read differently by literary critics, queer theorists, historians, psychoanalysts, and fieldworking materialist anthropologists.

Situated at the beginning of this section is Carolyn Dinshaw's "Margery Kempe Answers Back," a reading of gender and religious experience drawing upon literary studies, queer history, and cultural studies. This essay transports readers to medieval England and a world where heresy accusations intermingle with charges of hypocrisy, sexual deviance, and social disruption-and Margery's controversial decision to wear white clothes. "Why might Margery's sartorial practice evoke the suspicion that she intends to lead wives away from their husbands and homes?" This question focuses readers on the themes that concern Dinshaw throughout the book from which this essay is excerpted, Getting Medieval-themes of queerness, community, and history. This essay offers a close reading of Margery Kempe's testimony on her own behalf, in which she defends and explains her "excessive" love for Jesus. The next part of the essay takes up the problem of the apparent marginality of "the medieval" and "the queer" in a discussion set in yet a third setting-the U.S. Congress, where funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities came under threat in 1997. Invoking the spirit of Margery Kempe, Dinshaw offers a compelling defense of queer history against the governmental anxiety that would silence research in this area by defunding it. The Book of Margery Kempe, the first autobiography written in English, is by all accounts a "classic" text in the Western religious canon. And it also raises wonderfully complex questions about gender, religious identity and experience, institutional and personal religious authority, and personal and social compliance and resistance.

Religious experience, each of the authors in this section would argue, must be radically historicized and contextualized. One example of the importance of this interpretive practice can be seen in the emergence in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in England of two quite different discourses the scientific field of sexology and the religious formation of Theosophy. In her historical account of the relationship between these two modes of knowing, "Sexology and the Occult: Sexuality and Subjectivity in Theosophy's New Age," Joy Dixon explores how theories of sexuality and religion during this period struggled with each other for ascendancy in their attempts to account for the formation of subjectivity and personhood. Dixon articulates her project in this way: "I would like to explore an alternative trajectory in which-as psychics, mystics, or theosophists-men and women ... influenced, assimilated, and reworked new sexological and psychoanalytic claims regarding gender and sexuality into and through an elaborate constellation of spiritual beliefs, beliefs that they claimed were also scientific, even though their occult science might not be universally (or even very widely) recognized as such. Sexology may have triumphed as an academically respectable way of knowing about sex in the twentieth century but, at the time of its creation, it by no means held the field uncontested."

Theosophy was a very popular religious movement among England's elites, a syncretistic movement that blended mysticism, occult science, and spiritual practices and

offered an alternative to the dominant religious and intellectual streams of thought otherwise available. It was also tied to a range of social reform movements, from feminism to socialism and anti-imperialism. Its relative social marginality-and endurance of the concomitant accusations of sexual deviance and heresy-might be fruitfully read against Margery Kempe's experiences five centuries earlier in England. Like Margery Kempe, Theosophists "answered back" to their received traditions and found in their own, cobbled-together spiritual lives ways of expanding the frameworks that constructed and constrained their (sexual) lives. Theosophy is particularly interesting for its ability to harness its scientifico-spiritual insights into a livable defense of those whose gender identifications and sexual desires did not fit easily into received models. Past-life stories enabled some Theosophists to imagine a more complex (and not merely binary) relationship between "masculine" and "feminine" and to assert a potentially liberating malleability of identity in relation to the body. As Dixon puts it, "In the last analysis, it is perhaps not surprising that a female theosophist might prefer to think of herself not as a neurotic, hysterical, or deviant woman but as a Viking warrior who had only recently taken up residence in a woman's body and on whom the 'restraints of [her] sex press so heavily.' "

American religious history has been an especially rich source of examples of ecstatic religious experience and autobiographical reflection on such experiences. Among the most important are the autobiographical writings of two African American women-Jarena Lee of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and Rebecca Cox Jackson, who, although raised in the A. M. E. Church, became a leader in the Shaker Community.<sup>18</sup> Katherine Clay Bassard offers a reading of Jackson's texts as ritual performances in her essay, "Rituals of Desire: Spirit, Culture, and Sexuality in the Writings of Rebecca Cox Jackson." Carefully reconsidering the history of the relationship between Jarena Lee and Jackson, Bassard argues that "the case of Rebecca Cox Jackson and Jarena Lee represents a dialectic of difference occasioned by the mediation of abstract categories of identity-race, gender, class, sexuality-by very concrete, identifiable differences arising from their investments in competing religious discourses." Bassard analyzes Jackson's conversion story, "in which biblical imagery of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai is fused with imagery from Shan go, a West African religious cult." The echoes of African religious ideas, Bassard argues, highlight the diasporic quality of Jackson's ritual and religious life in which subjectivity, culture, and spirituality continue to be shaped by historical experiences of exile and displacement.

Bassard's reading of Jackson's writing as ritual and of her text as a negotiation of sexual identity can be compared with Dinshaw's discussion of Margery Kempe and Dixon's treatment of early-twentieth-century British Theosophists. All three essays, as well as the two that follow, continue to raise questions about how religious experience intersects with historical and social frameworks of possibility and constraint (including those of gender, class, race, sexuality). Bassard's and Dinshaw's literary/historical studies offer two different disciplinary approaches to the topic of gender and sexuality in relation to religious experience.

Disciplinary differences continue to be highlighted by the essays that complete this section of the book. In "The Woman Who Wanted to Be Her Father: A Case Analysis of Dybbuk-Possession in a Hasidic Community," one of two essays concerning spirit possession, Yoram Bilu details the story of a nineteenth-century Hasidic woman who came to be possessed by the spirit of her father. Beginning by noting the methodological difficulties involved in producing a case study out of evidence twice-removed from the original, the author nevertheless undertakes to analyze the story of Eidel, daughter of Rabbi Shalom in

the Galician town of Brody. The essay deploys psychoanalysis to interpret the meanings generated by Eidel's possession. Providing a brief survey of other possible interpretations of spirit possession, the author situates the story of Eidel in this broader theoretical context, and yet is careful to notice the particularities deriving from the Jewish (and, indeed, Hasidic) framework within which the story unfolds.

"The Woman Who Wanted to Be Her Father" can fruitfully be read in concert with Aihwa Ong's "The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia," which follows it. Ong's approach, based on her fieldwork among Malaysian factory workers, emphasizes the economic resistance that spirit possession produces for these working women. Taken together, the two essays suggest how possession works to negotiate the contradictions and constraints of gender, religious, and class ideology in quite different historical and geographical locations. Can religious experience be harnessed as a mode of resistance against the pressures of capitalist domination? Ong answers this question affirmatively.

"Possession" as a category within religious experience has always been a highly charged term. As can be seen in "The Woman Who Wanted to Be Her Father," "possession" cannot be understood in the abstract, but must be set in a social, cultural, and historical context in order to be rendered meaningful. Since I. M. Lewis's classic 1971 study, *Ecstatic Religion*, it has been received wisdom that women are disproportionately represented among the "possessed" for reasons that have now become almost clichéd: possession is more likely among those thought to be more spiritually and psychologically open while possession is also a socially acceptable means for expressing and mediating distress. Ong complicates this thesis by exploring the modes of resistance available to Muslim Malaysian workers on the shop floor of modern factories. Unable to resist their proletarianization in direct, political ways, the women's religious experiences express their feelings of dislocation in the wake of globalized capitalism. "Spirit possession episodes may be taken as expressions of both fear and of resistance against the multiple violations of moral boundaries in the modern factory. They are acts of rebellion, symbolizing what cannot be spoken directly, calling for a renegotiation of obligations between the management and workers."

Ong's essay and the essay preceding it concerning dybbuk-possession work together as two quite different disciplinary approaches to the complex experience of "possession" of women by spirits. Whereas Bilu's article is staunchly psychoanalytic, Ong's brings an anthropological critique of capitalism to bear on the experience of selves penetrated by the spirits of others-with new subjectivities produced in the process.

Part IV, "Gender, Religion, and Body Politics," recognizes that the body has been a central site for reflection on religious ideology and practice, and a place where questions of gender, materiality, and power have been negotiated. Religion is often the discourse and ideology through which societies negotiate their understandings of the body and by which they create systems of regulation and constraint for the body. These processes are anything but unitary, and they often intersect with other political motivations and interests. In this section, the "body" signifies both individual human bodies and collective social bodies, and the essays collected here illuminate the complexity of religious practices and meanings as they come to be written on the body.

Jonah Steinberg's essay, "From a 'Pot of Filth' to a 'Hedge of Roses' (and Back): Changing Theorizations of Menstruation in Judaism" takes up the question of purity in Jewish law, observing that although the legal tradition surrounding women's menstruation has remained "remarkably constant," the ideological constructions surrounding that

tradition "have undergone a near complete reversal." Whereas the rabbis of late antiquity and the Middle Ages mobilized a rhetoric that portrayed a menstruating woman as a vessel of disgust and a dangerous threat to the men around her, modern Jewish orthodoxy has turned toward arguments that emphasize the physical and psychological well-being of marriage partners who live by the rules constraining sexual intercourse during menstruation. "Uniformly, the modern Orthodox literature concerning menstruation seeks to obscure the earlier themes of revulsion and avoidance, stressing companionship and intimacy even as it prescribes meticulous physical separation." Yet, as Steinberg goes on to observe, "despite the aim of the 'family purity' manuals to appeal to modern sensibilities, dubious and archaic claims concerning women's bodies, sexuality, and emotions, as well as the dynamics of heterosexual monogamy, typify these new treatises on *hilkhot niddah* [the purity laws concerning menstruation)."

Purity regulations exist in many religious traditions, and many cultures have complex menstruation taboos that have been interpreted by anthropologists, both feminist and non-feminist. What is striking about Steinberg's analysis is the remarkable stability of the legal tradition's proscriptions while the rationalizing arguments surrounding them can be so varied and, indeed, flexible. As Steinberg puts it succinctly, "The prime requirement of the Orthodox Jewish life is not understanding, or even faith. The fundamental demand is action, practical observance." Hence, "purity" as a system can be open to multiple interpretations and structures of meaning; what remains constant is the demand to observe its dictates.

Intense concern with bodily practices is, of course, not limited to religious systems such as Orthodox Judaism. Such concern may be found dramatically expressed in one of the more curious passages in the Christian New Testament, a section of the apostle Paul's first letter to the Christian church in the Roman colonial city of Corinth. In this passage, Paul insists upon a strictly differentiated gender system: when praying or prophesying, men's heads must be uncovered and women's heads must be covered. The arguments for why this must be the case include the hierarchical order of the cosmos, which is replicated in the hierarchical order of creation, the order of nature itself, and the conventional practices of other Christian churches. What is at stake in this insistent rhetoric by Paul? This is the question Mary Rose D'Angelo seeks to answer in her essay, "Veils, Virgins, and the Tongues of Men and Angels:

Women's Heads in Early Christianity," a carefully argued, detailed analysis of Paul's rhetoric and that of his second-century North African reader and copolemicist, Tertullian. Placing the dramatic rhetoric of these two early church fathers in cultural and ideological context, D'Angelo brings into view some of the contentiousness and competition of the early church. Both Paul and Tertullian are concerned with the religious experiences and prophetic/visionary practices of unveiled women, and they mobilize arguments built upon their own claims to authority and upon the unquestionable authority of antiquity in order to rein in women's religious lives. As also seen in Part III on religious experience, anxieties over spiritual ecstasy often generate sexual slander-and such slander can be found in both Paul and Tertullian.

Why pay attention to such ancient-and, indeed, archaic-writers on the meanings of women's bodies? As D'Angelo argues, "On many levels, the rhetorical excesses, the overwrought moral rigor, and the ultimate schismatic bitterness of Tertullian make him an easy mark. But it should not be forgotten that in the long run, both Tertullian and Paul won. They won not only in terms of the literal imposition of veils and head-covering on women and virgins for many centuries, but in the larger battle they saw themselves fighting over the unveiled heads of women, the battle to shelter the divine and revelatory, the words of the

spirit and the eyes of the angels, from the sexualized presence of women . And they won too, in that the women whose heads were at issue remain veiled against our inquiry, cloaked in the male discourse that at once discloses and hides their presence. We cannot know the meaning they gave their gestures, or the hopes and expectations that accompanied them. These women are visible only through the eyes of the male controversialists, who do not see them either, for they are mocked into the *fascinum* of their own eroticizing gaze."

Like menstruation, the veil is a complex and non-unitary sign. Mary Rose D'Angelo's article on Paul and Tertullian traces the history of veiling practices among Christians and argues that the practice of veiling is a male effort to control women and their sexuality. In Homa Hoodfar's essay, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women," one encounters the practice of women's veiling in a different cultural context and with a different set of cultural constraints and meanings governing the practice itself. Expressing her frustrations with Western biases against Islam which have, interestingly, focalized upon the veil as the symbol of Islamic otherness-Hoodfar draws upon a range of historical and fieldwork sources to make a more complex argument about the veil. "I argue," she writes, "that the veil, which since the nineteenth century has symbolized for the West the inferiority of Muslim cultures, remains a powerful symbol both for the West and for Muslim societies. While for Westerners its meaning has been static and unchanging, in Muslim cultures the veil's functions and social significance have varied tremendously, particularly during times of rapid social change. Veiling is a lived experience full of contradictions and multiple meanings. While it has clearly been a mechanism in the service of patriarchy, a means of regulating and controlling women's lives, women have used the same social institution to free themselves from the bonds of patriarchy. Muslim women, like all other women, are social actors, employing, reforming, and changing existing social institutions, often creatively, to their own ends. The static colonial image of the oppressed 'veiled Muslim woman thus often contrasts sharply with the lived experience of veiling. To deny this is also to deny Muslim women their agency."

Together, D'Angelo's and Hoodfar's articles raise complex questions about gender constructions, ideological framings of the body, the role of religion as a transmitter of culture and values, and the multiplicity of meanings available for interpreting and understanding a single bodily practice. "The veil" is a highly charged flashpoint for discussions of gender and religion and of the political valences attached to certain practices that come to stand for "tradition" or "modernity." Consequently, these two essays offer two very different readings of the stakes involved in arguments for and against the veil.

Another critical flashpoint at the intersection of religion, gender, and the body resides in the realm of "politicized religion." Several articles take up this problematic in quite different ways. In their essay, "Women Who Walk on Water: Working across 'Race' in Women Against Fundamentalism," Clara Connolly and Pragna Patel enact a form of coalition-building activism-two women from quite different social locations within late-capitalist Britain, working together in an organization to counter the "modern political movements that use religion as a basis for their attempt to win or consolidate power and extend social control." The two writers use a number of concrete examples of struggles in the postcolonial British context to demonstrate the complex (and sometimes contradictory) intersections of such factors as race, sexuality, cultural citizenship, and immigration status with gender and religion. In the process, the essay raises crucial theoretical questions about at least three charged terms-"identity," "multiculturalism," and "secularism." This essay can be read fruitfully in concert with Minoo Moallem's "Transnationalism, Feminism, and

**Fundamentalism"-an essay that, among other things, troubles two additional categories: "feminism" and "fundamentalism."**

**Patricia Jeffery's "Agency, Activism, and Agendas," meanwhile, focuses on women's activism "on the ground" in South Asia as a response in recent years to the growing politicized religion in the region. The essay urges readers to move beyond facile attributions of the role of "victim" to South Asian women, and to focus instead on agency and activism among these women. Exploring struggles over ideology and experience, the essay focuses on a range of strategies and impulses that drive feminist movements around both local and global concerns. Among the topics that are explored here are the varying effects of certain discursive and ideological moves-the use of the category of "motherhood" and its religious resonances (both in the connections between mothers and goddesses and in the iconization of woman as mother), the mobilization of images of Hindu goddesses as emblems for gender activism among women, the attempts to decenter politicized religion's claims to authority in interpreting religious traditions, and so on. Feminist politics in these contexts are often organized around women's interests in controlling their own bodies-from sexuality and reproductive life to freedom of movement and other forms of resistance to bodily subordination. Religion frequently offers an idiom for both feminists and antifeminists to express their political arguments. How this is played out in the South Asian context is amply demonstrated by this impressive essay, at once a survey of the field and a manifesto for ongoing activism.**

**Of course, politicized religion is not limited to locations outside the United States, and there are two essays in the volume that take up issues of body politics, gender, and religious ideology and practice in the U.S. context. In her essay "Tender Warriors," literature scholar Linda Kintz looks at the grassroots Christian men's movement and its particular manifestation in groups like the Promise Keepers. Exploring the psychological, political, and theological dimensions of their attempts to inscribe gender differences (grounded in a particular reading of the Bible) onto the bodies of men and women, Kintz offers a compelling and critical model for reading the rhetoric of popular Christian literature at the present moment. Kintz closes with a discussion of how this particular Christian construction of gender roles has made its way into legal arguments presented in U.S. courts in defense of "religious freedom" and "the family."**

**In their essay "Getting Religion," Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini pick up where Kintz leaves off by exploring the role of the category of "religion" in the workings of the U.S. Supreme Court's actions in regulating sexuality in particular, homosexuality. Arguing that " 'religious/secular' is a distinction without a difference," they explore what this distinction enables and effaces in the discourses of the state around sexuality. Examining in particular two cases, *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) and *Romer v. Evals* (1996), the essay traces how an idealized "secularism" is produced along with figurations of the "homosexual." The Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Georgia sodomy statutes in *Bowers* included Justice Burger's assertion: "Decisions of individuals relating to homosexual conduct have been subject to state intervention throughout the history of Western Civilization. Condemnation of those practices is firmly rooted in judaeo-Christian moral and ethical standards." Such a claim dehistoricizes and naturalizes the complex character of "Western" antiquity at the same time that it effaces the links between ancient religious teachings on sexuality (which are canonized here) and ancient religious teachings on dietary purity (which are routinely ignored as outdated or irrelevant) or teachings on gender hierarchy (which are at least widely contested). The point here is that the ways in which "religion" is mobilized in the monitoring and regulation of certain forms of sexuality by the**

state are relevant to thinking about the relationship between "religion," the "body," and "gender." This essay also reminds us that "politicized religion," a term from Patricia Jeffery's essay, is a relevant analytic category in the American context-especially useful for understanding the invocation of religion in the purportedly secular framework of the state's highest judicial body.

Part V, "Gender and Religion in the Politics of the Academy," brings this volume to a close with Judith Plaskow's sobering assessment of the state of gender and feminism in the academic study of religion in her 1998 Presidential Address to the American Academy of Religion, "The Academy as Real Life: New Participants and Paradigms in the Study of Religion." Tracing the history of the emergence of feminist and gender studies in religion within the main professional organization for scholars of religion, Plaskow develops a narrative in which changes in the Academy mirror changes in the society more broadly. Tracking the changes in the AAR from her days as a graduate student in religion to the moment of her election as its president, Plaskow discusses how the AAR has (in some places) yielded to intense political pressure to transform itself from a Protestant men's club into a more diverse and representative intellectual body. At the same time, she cautions readers about the shifting economics of academia. It isn't only that job security and benefits in the form of tenure are eroding. The university also continues to embrace an increasingly corporate business model, filling its classrooms with exploited adjunct and part-time faculty. All of this happens at the same time that capitalism itself emerges as a more compelling religious system than those that long predated it. Urging her hearers not to capitulate to the clichéd bifurcation between "the academy" and "real life," Plaskow insists that the study of religion-now transformed in critical ways by feminism and other cognate activisms-recognize its place in "the real world" and reject a self-understanding that would divorce it from that real world's many struggles.

Because of the constraints of space and as a result of the different stages of development of scholarship in the field, this book provides coverage of very specific geographical areas and only a small sampling of religious traditions. For example, South Asia has been the site of extremely important work at the intersections of gender, politics, and religion and is, as a consequence, well represented in the volume. Meanwhile, scholarship on religion in East Asia China and Japan, in particular-is only now turning its attention in a theoretically sophisticated way to questions of gender. Moreover, the focus is overwhelmingly on the northern hemisphere of the globe so that Latin America and Australia are not represented here. Finally, since "gender" appears prominently in the title, it is important to acknowledge that the book does not reflect a strictly enforced gender balance, although a significant number of the essays included in the volume address issues of masculinity either obliquely or substantively (Orsi, Moallem, Bal, Jay, Dixon, Bilu, Kintz). The fact of the matter is that feminist work in religion, focused as it has been more on women than on gender, is simply at a more advanced stage of development than the newer field of masculinity studies. The inevitable exclusions that are necessary in compiling an anthology represent difficult editorial choices, and they are the product of the decision to try to keep the book as theoretically focused and thematically coherent as possible.

This is a book that was envisioned from the start as having multiple audiences. The essays compiled here raise complex theoretical questions for specialists in the field, but they also provide the newcomer to feminist academic study of religion with many points of entry. We have hoped that the book will contribute to many different conversations taking place in a wide range of locations - the university seminar room, the academic conference hall, the coffee house, even the dinner table. For academics and activists who work outside of the

**academic study of religion, we hope this book will issue an invitation to look more closely at the contentious and complex world of religion as it is inflected in relation to gender ideologies and lived, embodied social experiences. For specialists in the field of religious studies, we hope the essays collected here will make a strong argument for heightened interdisciplinarity in the study of religion and for the importance of politically and ethically engaged scholarly work in our collective enterprise. We also hope that this book will help promote the radical paradigm shift that a generation of feminist work in the field has produced so that this work might achieve the recognition it rightfully deserves. Finally, we hope this book will contribute to a broader effort, undertaken in many different institutional locations and by many different people, to press the field to transform its practices of teaching and research in light of the foundational challenge that feminist scholarship embodies.**