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V. Gender

Alexandra Cuffel

ABSTRACT Our goal for *Entangled Religions* is to inform readers about occasions, themes, modes, conditions, and consequences of contacts between religious groups and the way religious thought and practice developed in and through such contact phenomena, eventually creating both the larger and smaller religious traditions of today and the religious field as a social entity distinct from other fields such as politics, economics, and art. *Entangled Religions* publishes case studies on the issues outlined above. The engagement with explicit analytical concepts is of specific importance, as those concepts shall serve as *tertia comparationis*, which allow comparability of individual case studies. We invite authors to consider engaging their material with analytical concepts, categories and approaches that have been discussed in the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) "Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe" (2008–2022), or to introduce other concepts and theories to the discussion. The KHK Working Paper Series informs readers about some major aspects of the KHK's thinking about these concepts. We are looking forward to your contributions to this ongoing conversation!

Like for history, gender is a useful, indeed essential, category of analysis for religious studies on multiple levels (Wallach Scott 1989, 28–50).[1] Scholars have examined the degree to which given religions are or have been practiced and experienced differently by men and women, sometimes to the point that one may speak of "women's" religion as opposed to men's, because cultic practices have been segregated according to gendered categories. Such divisions may be according to simple biological binaries of male and female, for example, in divisions between men and women's religious roles in ancient Greece and Rome (Håland 2009, 109–48, 2001, 197–251, 2006, 303–26; Cuffel 2005, 401–19; Hambly 1998, 1–27; Walker Bynum 1987; Mernissi 1977; Fernea and Fernea 1972; Denzey 2007; Kraemer 1992; Scullard 1981, 76–78, 80, 90, 102, 116–17, 120, 150–52, 173–74, 199–201; Parke 1977, 82–88, 159–60; Harrison 1957, 99–100, 107, 120–62). Rituals focusing on the bodily differences, fluids and functions of men and women, for example, initiation rites centering on the alteration of boys' or girls' genitalia, purity regulations relating to semen and menstrual blood; religious laws and rituals celebrating and/or regulating the birthing process or the relationship between [1]

1 This working paper was written in 2017 and updated in 2023.

mother and child – are key elements in the ritual cycles and the conceptualizations of the boundaries between sacred and profane in numerous religious traditions (Secunda 2015, 28–31; Smid 2012, 389–429; Werett 2007, 46–92, 153–68, 197–202, 277–87; Holmes Katz 2002, 86–96, 123–44, 187–203; Fonrobert 2000; Bell 1997, 1, 15, 40, 50–59, 97–98, 101, 238–39, 258; Leslie 1994, 63–81; Harrington 1993; Reinhart 1990, 1–24; Choksy 1989; Parker 1983; Douglas 1966).

[2] Yet gender is not a mere binary within the field of religion. The concept of constructed or "third" genders also have a powerful role, both in forms of segregated religious experience and practice, and in the symbolic vocabulary adopted to define self and "other", sacred individuals, and finally in humans' imagining of the divine and the cosmos. Instances in which a "third" or other gender outside a binary of male and female has particular roles, rituals and experiences within the larger community include the hijras (sp?) in India and the so called "bardache" among certain tribes of the Americas (Herdt 1994). The eunuch in Byzantine Christianity was alternately perceived as problematic and devious, but also, according to some scholars, closer to the angelic body, a status they shared with prepubescent adolescents, and occupying a liminal state between the human and divine worlds (Ringrose 2003, 1994; James 1997). This symbolic imagining was reshaped in the Islamic world (Marmon 1995). The idea of the "manly woman", a woman, who because of her spiritual endeavors, often including extreme asceticism, and behavior is transformed to a masculine (and thus superior) spiritual status has a long history in both eastern and western Christianity, and echoes within Judaism and Islam (Honegg 2004; Vogt 2004, 163–78; Davis 2002, 1–36; Amer 2001, 179–98; de Nie 1995, 100–161; Cloke 1995; Miled 1995, 47–60; Harvey 1990, 36–59; Meyer 1985, 554–70; Anson 1974, 1–32). In theosophic Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, gender is an essential component in conceptualizing the divine and the demonic, both of which are divided in to masculine and feminine pairs, and in describing the relationship between God and human, where the Shekhinah, feminine in her relationship with other divine sefirot, or aspects of the divine, is often understood as becoming masculine in her encounter with male students of the Torah, even as these normally male scholars, become feminine relative to her (Koren 2011; Idel 2005; Wolfson 2005, 1995, 2009–2228, 1994a, 1994b, 166–204, 1986, 27–52; Abrams 2006, 7–29). In such a system, as in others, gender is mutable, and what and who is male, female, or something else, has as much or more to do with the symbolic meanings assigned to these designations than with the genitalia of individual humans.

[3] The brief discussion above outlines but a few of the ways in which gender is significant in analyzing religious ritual, law, and symbolism, generally. However, gender often plays a particularly important role in processes of religious demarcation, transfer, adaptation, and resistance between different religious communities or between competing segments of the same community.

Demarcation

[4] Competing religious and ethnic groups are often described as "feminine" in relation to the true, superior, masculine group making such claims. This kind of discourse has long been part of western, European Christian rhetoric, whether in describing the weak, cursed, fearful menstruating feminized Jewish men in relationship to the rational, spiritual, masculine Christians during the Middle Ages, or contrasting feminized Bengali Muslim and Hindu men to properly masculine British Christians in the nineteenth century (Resnick 2012, 181–214;

Cuffel 2007, 160–82; Harrison 1999; Arnold 1993, @wallachscott_gender_1989). Medieval Jews, Muslims, and Christians, also used excessive, "wrong," animalistic masculinity as a way of condemning those in power or competition with them, both within their own circles, or in their polemic against Christians and Muslims respectively (Cuffel 2007, 118–19, 146–48, 153, 186–87, 214–24; Hillenbrand 1999, 266, 270–74, 276, 285, 301–3, 317–18). Accusations of sexual misbehavior has often also been a common method of marking given groups or individuals as religiously problematic or undesirable, at least within religious traditions stemming from the Mediterranean (Kraemer 2009, 635–65; Puff 2003; Garza Carvajal 2003; Cook 2002, 13, 333–44; Satlow 1995; Kohlberg 1991, 237–66). Finally, women's behaviors, bodies, customs, clothing, treatment or roles within a given tradition have frequently become a means by which women's roles may circumscribed and women may be marked as religiously problematic within a tradition, or by which one religious tradition may criticize another (Knobler 2007; Cuffel 2007; Cook 2002, 13, 333–44; Leslie 1994; Kraemer 1994; Paul 1985, 3–59). This method of demarcation is exemplified most recently in the arguments and legislation regarding Muslim women's clothing in Europe (Amer 2014, 75–130). All of these various rhetorical strategies serve in some way to create clear(er) dividing lines between religious desirable and undesirable individuals and communities.

Transfer, Adaption, and Resistance

Processes of transfer, adaption, and resistance are also frequently gendered, whether on a [5]
symbolic or experiential level. Goddesses and saints associated with fertility are among the most common which are transferred and adapted from one religious milieu to another, Isis and the Virgin Mary, being merely among the best known examples (Remensnyder 2014; Kroger and Granziera 2012; Ulmer 2009, 215–43; Busby and Cannell 2006, 77–98; Haase 2004, 107–36, 2001, 317–38; Frankfurter 1990, 13–25). In pre-modern societies missionizing via preaching and teaching was often (though not always) done by men, particularly when it involved traveling over long distances, whereas women were used to transfer religious ideas through inter-marriage (Hadler 2008; Gräslund 2003, 483–96; Melammed 1999, 1970–1219; Ryan 1998, 411–21; Macnamara 1987, 19–37). Martyrdom as a form of testimony to the truth of a given religious tradition, and the establishment of monasteries in frontier areas, on the other hand, are aspects of religious transfer in which both men and women engaged. During antiquity and the Middle Ages, modes of representing such martyrdoms were often stylized along gendered lines; however. Descriptions of women martyrs often emphasized issues of purity/impurity, virginity/motherhood relating to the martyrs themselves, and brutality and sexual excess on the part of male persecutors, so that the representation of martyrdom serves not only to teach and transfer, but in its representation, is a form of rhetorical, gendered, demarcation (Cobb 2008; Einbinder 2002; Boyarin 1999). In modern contexts martyrdom continues to be "educational"—a form of transferring not merely acceptable and unacceptable forms of religious practice and attitudes, but also serve to enforce ideals of masculinity and femininity (Aslam 2012; Varzi 2006, 76–105, 155–74). Monasteries were often segregated or semi-segregated between men and women, so that their function as nodes of knowledge/religious transfer were structured according to gendered divisions and organization (Kaushik 2016; Lifshitz 2014; Arai 2012; Meeks 2010; Coon 2010; Thibodeaux 2010; Hamburger 1998; Johnson 1991). In the past, men were often under greater pressure to convert from one religion to another, whether because of increased exposure and public access,

or for the sake of economic advancement, whereas women frequently served as the carriers and preservers of religious traditions and practices, especially during periods of persecution or pressure from the outside, and thus served as a main source of resistance to compulsion to change religious affiliation. In both pre-modern and modern milieu, the experiences and expectations of new converts continue to be divided along gender; indeed conversion constitute both a religious and "gender" transformation (Hadler 2008; Rao 2015, 413–35; van Klinken 2012, 215–39; Cuffel 2007, 137–66; Erzen 2006; El-Leithy 2005).

For *Entangled Religions,* authors are encouraged to consider these and other issues relating [6] to gender and inter-religious encounter, exchange and resistance in individual case studies. The trends sketched above are meant as examples, contributors are encouraged to select what paradigms most fit their own findings within their research areas.

Relevant *Entangled Religions* Articles

Aeschbach, Miriam. 2020. "Invoking the Secular: Gendered Delineations of Muslim Belonging in Switzerland." *Entangled Religions* 11 (1). https://doi.org/10.13154/er.11.2020.8645.

Kravtsova, Victoria. 2022. " 'Zuleikha opens her Eyes' in (Post-) Colonial Russia." *Entangled Religions* 13 (8). https://doi.org/10.46586/er.13.2022.9914.

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