

Introduction

Women, Religion and Secularization: One Size Does Not Fit All

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Introduction

This volume arises from several core questions concerning women's religiosity in the West: Why do women predominate numerically in religion? Given this, why are many disaffiliating? And when they leave, where are they going and what are they doing? These developments in women's religiosity have occurred in parallel with – but without much reference to – a major and enduring debate in the sociology of religion: secularization. Secularization refers to the process whereby the sacred loses its significance and can occur on several levels: societal, individual and within a religion itself (Dobbelaere 2002; Casanova 2006). In this book we attempt to bring women's religiosity into dialogue with secularization theories.

We take it as a given that in the western world, secularization is a fact even in countries (such as the United States) where church participation is still high. Secularization is a modern phenomenon: it arises when certain events and ways of thinking associated with modernity come together. By this, we do not mean to suggest (as some have) that a given culture *must* secularize as it modernizes.

Historical overview

Secularization theorists often point to the schism of the churches in the West, which began with Luther in the sixteenth century, as the first of the multiple threads that led to secularized modernity. It is not that Luther, Calvin and others *caused* secularization so much as that they represented a particular way of thinking which has come to be typical of modern western societies. That is, they questioned the authority of what had previously been unquestionable: the Catholic Church, its Pope and its priests. The separation of what became the Lutheran Church from the Catholic Church gave rise to many and varied schisms. Rather than there only being one Church, very quickly there was a multitude of churches to choose from; which was the *true* church depended on where you stood. Similarly, the rationalist philosophy of the eighteenth century is also key to the development of the modern mindset. Philosophers began to question the authority of God and elevated the rational or the mind over 'feeling'. As a result, the church came to be associated with *irrationality*; God did not make sense. Descartes' 'I think therefore I am' is a radical break from the long held beliefs

of the Nicene Creed: 'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible'.

The industrial revolution which occurred in the West in the late eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries undoubtedly sped up the process not of secularization per se (church attendance in the late nineteenth-century was as high as perhaps it had ever been, as Marler shows in this volume), but of particular ways of experiencing and thinking about the world. Industrialization involved urbanization, which led to the separation of work from home (for men, and for some women). The terrible working conditions of many meant that the home came to be idealized as a haven, which further promoted the split between the public and the private. If work was in the public realm, and home was the private, where did this leave the church? Depending on the country, the church was more or less bound up with the state, but the state was taking over many church functions, such as welfare and schooling. More and more then, the church came to be seen as part of the private realm. Meanwhile, between industrialization and the First World War, men were increasingly feeling alienated from the sacred. The sacred and the profane, like the public and the private, became compartmentalized, and many men spent most of their time in the awful conditions of the profane. This had two consequences. The horrors of the Second World War drove many back to the church: it was familiar and comfortable, it united communities torn apart by war, and it provided stability in a world that desperately craved it. Nevertheless, the rebellious children of the Baby Boom generation saw the church as old-fashioned and irrelevant and many turned away from it.

There are several things to note about this brief summary. First, it gives the impression of an inexorable and uniform process (across class, gender, nation and religion). Second, it does not explain the rise and continued health of certain forms of Christianity. Third, it is a theory that only fits a certain segment of western populations; that is, it fits white men, and especially white, Protestant men in Europe. We will return to these issues after briefly examining some of the theories of secularization that attempt to nuance the argument.

Critiques

David Martin (2005a, 2005b) has pointed out that some forms of Christianity have fared quite well and have even grown under secularization: he argues that secularization, rather than being uniform, is better thought of as two (or more) streams that exist alongside each other. Evangelical and charismatic Christianity, which until very recently were the only growing forms of Christianity in the West, parallel the flight from the rest of the churches. This is what Woodhead and Heelas (2000) have called 'co-existence theory'. Similarly, taking into account geographical differences in secularization rates by looking at, among other things, the links between church and state in different countries reveals that in states where the church has been strongly tied to a repressive state, church attendance levels are often low. Where state and church have long been separate, at least officially, church attendance levels tend to remain high, such as in the United States (Martin 2005b). This theory is refined by

factoring in levels of industrialization and postindustrialization: in countries that are postindustrialized, attendance levels tend to be lower (Norris and Inglehart 2004).

The general critique of secularization theories is well known. A large group of theorists have pointed out that rather than secularizing, western societies are actually showing signs of (re)sacralization. This means that people return to thinking about the sacred and relocate the sacred in a newly holistic manner. The rise of alternative spiritualities, now the fastest growing religious form in the West (Berger et. al. 2003; Reid, this volume), has led some to highlight this trend. Indeed, one of the original proponents of secularization theory, Peter Berger, is now one of the strongest voices arguing the case for (re)sacralization (1999).¹ Derationalization is an important feature of sacralization. Where religion came to be seen as backward and anti-modern, in late or post modernity – with the rise of alternative spiritualities in particular – questioning begins of the dualistic tendencies that once defined modernity and a new holism emerges.² Other key features of (re)sacralization are: *deprivatization*, or the public sphere's reenchantment with religion (Casanova 1994) – seen, for example in the growing involvement of religious groups in public policy and welfare service provision as well as the incorporation of subjective wellbeing spiritualities into the culture as a whole (Heelas 1996; Heelas and Woodhead 2005); *religious growth through conversion* – for example, the conversion of western non-believers to Islam or evangelical Christianity; and *intensification* through the radicalization of previously less committed believers – for example, growing support for forms of more radical or fundamentalist religion (Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 429–475; Berger 1999).

In taking Europe as a model that is then applied globally or at least to the rest of the West, secularization theory is often Eurocentric (Davie 2002).³ Secularization has largely been propounded by white, male Judeo-Christian (in culture or faith) academics (Berger 1999: 2) and has tended to be blind to the experiences of other groups. In part, the lack of attention to religions other than Christianity is understandable: forms of religion which have central bodies of organization, such as the Vatican, and clear physical and public meeting points (i.e. churches), are easy to count. But religious formations which are diffuse with no central organization, or which are opposed to centralized organization, or those with small, regular non-institutionalized meetings, such as holistic spirituality, Wiccan covens or Jewish Friday night Shabbat meals, are harder to count (Heelas 2006). As Hussain notes in this volume, Tietze (2000) has shown how the standard ways of measuring religiosity have arisen from the rationalization of religious traditions, which is a symptom, he argues, of secularization itself. Exactly how non-Christian religions like Islam fit with the secularization paradigm is a long-overdue question (Chambers 2006).

¹ Berger (1999: 12) also refutes what he calls the 'last-ditch thesis' of sociologists of religion such as Bruce (2006). This thesis says that resurgence only shows a last-ditch defence or dying gasp of religiosity, which cannot last.

² For more on the changes associated with late or postmodernity, and their implications for religion see: Flanagan and Jupp 1996; Heelas 1998; Woodhead and Heelas 2000.

³ Occasionally these analyses are helpfully nuanced by gender: for instance, Bernice Martin (2001) points out the growth of Pentecostalism amongst women in South America. Her findings are not foregrounded here, however, because of this volume's concern with the postindustrial West.

Gender

The gendered, or feminist, critique of secularization is less well known – that is, what happens when women’s experiences are taken as the standpoint from which to examine secularization. This question was notably raised by Linda Woodhead (2001, 2005), whose arguments have informed this essay and who, with colleagues at Lancaster University,⁴ organized the 2005 British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion Study Group conference *Religion and Gender*, from which several chapters in this volume originated. This volume gives room for the first time for an extended discussion of this theme.

Some theorists of women, religion and secularization featured in this book accept the secularization theses, but others do not. This means that while some are concerned with refining the theories so that they take account of secularization’s impact on women, others challenge the theoretical premises of secularization from the perspective of women’s experiences; this second group tend to endorse the arguments of sacralization theorists and add to sacralization theory the experiences of women. This volume takes account of both perspectives, and some writers express a combination of the two.

Callum Brown’s (2001) book *The Death of Christian Britain* represents an important attempt to explore women’s relationship with secularization. Brown shows how, between 1800 and 1963, religiosity was driven by textual, media and literary discourse about personal identity available through Christian novels, magazines, obituaries and tracts. Life stories were entwined with constructions of gender and Christianity. Religiosity was identified with femininity, while men were represented as irreligious or reluctant believers, and this impacted rates of churchgoing. When people’s gendered identities were tied to Christianity, religiosity remained high, particularly among women. But when representations of personal identity shifted away from Christianity from the 1960s (Brown pinpoints 1963 as the key date), secularization advanced. The liberalization in sexual attitudes and behaviour and the advent of feminism issued major blows to Christian religiosity. In the industrial period women had been identified as the main carriers and supporters of religiosity, so when women accepted feminism and sexual liberalism as alternative resources for identity construction, this was a significant setback for the church. Church attendance declined sharply, and femininity ceased to be associated with piety.

Brown is not without critics (Percy 2001; Morris 2003; Gill 2003⁵), but two important points can be drawn from his work. First, within industrializing modernity, the period identified with secularization, secularization occurred differently for women and men. An important facet of institutional or structural differentiation relates to the division of society into public and private spheres. While men became occupied with the public world of work and (for the middle-classes) governance, women’s

⁴ The organizing committee comprised of Linda Woodhead, Paul Heelas, Sevgi Kilic, Sonya Sharma and Giselle Vincett.

⁵ For example, Percy (2001) ponders the viability of calling the industrializing West’s religion ‘feminized’, given the dominance of men at its leadership and governmental levels. He and others also dispute the extent to which Christian Britain can be said to have died.

activities took place largely in the domestic arena (Elshtain 1981; Davidoff and Hall 1987; Tilly and Scott 1987; Pateman 1988; Poovey 1988; Seccombe 1992, 1993; Clark 1995).⁶ The core characteristics of secularizing modernity – rationalization, separation of church and state, bureaucratization, industrialization, capitalism – were mainly driven forward in the public arena by men. The division of women and men into ‘separate spheres’, coupled with the privatization of religion as it lost its social influence, feminized religion, connecting it with women’s activities in the private sphere. It is difficult to know exactly how this feminization contributed to men’s declining attendance or women’s increasing attendance, but it is clear that these changes occurred, and that the existing preponderance of women as churchgoers is connected to this.

Second, Brown’s work highlights that women’s disaffiliation from traditional forms of religion is vital to understanding patterns of religiosity, secularization and sacralization. Women’s move into paid employment, together with their quest for more egalitarian sexual relationships and the right to make choices about their lives, changed the gendered construction of the private/public boundary and the stability of religion in the private realm. Marler’s contribution to this book maps this quantitatively across the US and UK. These crucial two points crystallize to form a key paradox explored by this book: women are both the most religious⁷ and are disaffiliating from religion in significant numbers, so much so that their changing social position is seen as a key cause of secularization.

But if Brown stands with those who believe that secularization has occurred, others consider secularization a totalizing metanarrative that has had unfortunate consequences for women. Bracke writes in this volume of the problematic way in which secularization theories have upheld a norm of masculine rationality. Modern men’s experiences are taken as the norm and model for the future of religion: when men leave religion, religion is said to be dying, regardless of its continuity in women’s lives. Measuring religiosity is difficult, but existing measures continue to find that women’s religious involvement exceeds men’s across different nations, religions and types of society, and that in western postindustrialized and Christian/post-Christian contexts this gender imbalance is particularly pronounced (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 49–72). Often women’s continued religiosity is viewed as marginal to the ‘main event’ of male secularization; evoking a series of binary oppositions

⁶ The separate spheres family remained unattainable for many working-class people. Low wages paid to working-class men made it unviable economically and working-class women and men worked as servants in middle-class families (Seccombe 1992, 1993; Clark 1995). In equating ideal gendered behaviour with middle-class values, separate spheres discourse was oppressive towards the working classes, who were expected by religious, medical, legal and literary ideologues to attempt to conform to middle-class ideals of full-time motherhood despite their lack of economic resources.

⁷ For example, in 2005, women constituted 57 per cent of English churchgoers (Brierley 2006: 12.3). The US Congregational Life Survey produced a figure of 61 per cent (see Marler, this volume). Alternative religions are harder to count. Berger et al. (2003: 27) found 64.8 per cent of adherents were female in the US and Heelas and Woodhead (2005: 94) found that 80 per cent of those involved in the holistic milieu (an inclusive term that includes New Age and alternative spiritualities) in Kendal, UK, were women.

that feminist theorists have long critiqued (de Beauvoir 1953; Friedan 1963; Daly 1968), women are positioned as the irrational others of secularizing modernity. This, we believe, must be exposed and replaced by the argument that totalizing theories of secularization collapse in the face of women's experiences. Women's experiences instead point to a different 'truth' about religiosity in contemporary times.

Women's religious experiences prompt some additional challenges to secularization theories. These concern the problem of measuring women's religiosity and the neglect of non-Christian religion and spirituality when theorizing women's beliefs. Conventional measures of gender and religiosity often relate to attendance at places of worship, frequency of prayer, study of religious texts and adherence to religious doctrines or beliefs (e.g. Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi 1975; Walter 1990; Loewenthal *et al.* 2002; Inglehart and Norris 2003: 49–72⁸). But measuring women's religiosity by attendance at places of worship can be inaccurate. This is because religious obligations for men and women are sometimes different, with women's involvement in domesticity and childrearing considered a more important expression of faith than attendance at a place of worship – this seems especially so for Jews and Muslims. Additionally, some religious bodies forbid women entry to public places of worship when they are menstruating. Others deny women admittance altogether – for instance, women are currently unable to enter half the UK's mosques on the basis of their gender, and are encouraged to pray instead at home (*Dispatches: Women-only Jihad*, 2006, London: Channel 4). It seems, therefore, that existing measures work better for Christian women's religiosity than for other religions, as chapters in the Islam section of this book show. Indeed, some of the existing work exploring reasons for women's dominance in religiosity treats religiosity as synonymous with Christianity (for example, Walter 1990; Davie 1994: 117–138; Walter and Davie 1998).

'New Age' or neo-pagan spiritualities – which might prompt one to attend yoga classes, invoke the goddess or seek out various alternative therapies – is not conducive to conventional measures of religiosity either, and since women predominate in alternative spiritualities (Heelas and Woodhead 2005: 94–107), not measuring alternative spirituality is particularly problematic. We take issue with the belief (as expressed, for example, in Bruce 2006: 42) that there is no community in alternative spiritualities and that therefore they are difficult to count. Casanova (2006: 18) points out that most theories of secularization assume that the processes of modernization ultimately 'make community inviable', but he argues instead that modernity simply makes new forms of community possible, especially 'voluntary associations'. Alternative spiritualities are based upon such new forms of community, especially small voluntary groups. The gender gap in alternative spiritualities leads us to ask whether these forms of community are particularly appealing to women.

It is worth saying a few words about the apparent exclusion of men's experiences from this book. It might be argued that in focusing on women specifically, rather than gender in general, we are neglecting half of the population. Our response to this is

⁸ Some studies take account of the need to conceptualise religiosity differently across different traditions – for example, Miller and Stark (2002) include keeping kosher and lighting Sabbath candles as measures of Jewish religiosity.

first that secularization theories have thus far mainly been about men's religious and/or secularizing behaviours. This is the case in so far as explanations for secularization have been related to the changing nature of work, which during modernity was a predominantly male activity. We believe that the impact of secularization on women needs to be considered. Additionally, men's behaviour has often been taken as the norm from which generalizations can be made about the general population. We believe that this is a mistaken move. Not only does women's spirituality fail in some cases to conform to the male norm, but it often challenges the validity of these norms. So in addressing women's place vis-à-vis secularization we aim to redress a long-neglected balance.

Feminism

Significant to women and secularization is the feminist movement. During the rise of second-wave feminism from the 1960s, most secular feminists rejected traditional religiosity as irredeemably patriarchal. Looking back however, even Christian feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who published *The Women's Bible* in 1898, felt that traditional Christianity had largely discounted women's contributions to church life. The tireless efforts of first-wave feminists, many of whom possessed a Christian background, paved the way for future feminist theologians during the 1960s and 1970s who would pick up from where Stanton finished, articulating the marginalization of women associated with patriarchal Christianity. Scholars have generally considered women's departure from traditional religion during second-wave feminism an example of secularization (Brereton and Bendroth 2001). Subsequently, mainstream feminism has given little coverage to women's religiosity. Leela Fernandes (2003: 9) argues that 'feminist theorists and organizations tend to relegate spirituality to the local "cultural" idiom of grassroots women (usually in "other" places and for "other" women), acknowledging it in the name of an uneasy cultural relativist tendency of "respecting cultural difference."'

Furthermore, the many women who have left traditional religion have not necessarily experienced secularization, but have acquired other, non-sexist spiritualities. Women's turn to other forms of spirituality and religiosity means that they are not rejecting modernity as much as they are undertaking a complex series of negotiations with modern culture, constructing reciprocal forms of accommodation and resistance (Brereton and Bendroth 2001: 215). As is apparent in this collection, women's responses to secularization differ. Some leave traditional church (Aune; Sharma); others join alternative spiritual communities (Vincett; Reid; Woodhead); while others reclaim and/or renegotiate traditional religion (Trzebiatowska; Bracke; Ramji; Schmidt). These in-depth qualitative studies are particularly successful in representing these different meanings and (re)formations of women's individual and collective spirituality, bringing a novel contribution to feminist knowledge.

Communities

One of the givens of this book is that secularization exists in some form and all individuals in the West must engage with that backdrop. Whilst adherents of religions that are connected with immigration into predominantly Christian countries remain religious, they appear to be so in part because of secularization. David Martin (2005b) has suggested that high levels of religiosity amongst such communities reflect their desire to differentiate themselves from their (nominally) Christian neighbours by building strong religious communities. Although differentiation and identity remain important factors in second-generation religiosity remaining high, Ramji and Schmidt indicate that second generations are reacting to other factors. Second generation Muslim Canadians, argues Ramji, think of themselves as fully Canadian; what they assert through their religiosity is their difference from the dominant secular context. Bracke's research indicates that in western countries where religion was forcibly separated from the state, high levels of religiosity amongst young Muslim women signify an assertion of an identity distinct from the dominant order, and a contemporary and progressive version of the religion of their grandmothers. Similarly, conservative forms of Christianity actively try to counteract secularization by differentiating themselves from society and engaging in mission. Adherents of alternative forms of spirituality, and especially of political forms such as feminist Wicca, are also differentiating themselves from the dominant orders, both in their formation of a (re)sacralized worldview and against male hegemony. In all of these cases then, religion becomes a way of expressing one's identity and agency against the context of secularization.

Space

This siphoning off of religion into the private realm may go some way to explaining why there appears to be less evidence of secularization among Muslim than Christian women. Their holistic conceptualization of society disaffirms any notion of a public/private split. Martin similarly identifies Islamic societies' tendency to see religion as 'a complete system co-extensive with society' (2005b: 28). Hussain makes this point in this book, noting that British Muslims are considerably more likely than other groups to say that religion impacts how they live their lives. Indeed, it is ethnic minorities, especially Muslims, who have brought new fervour to religion in Britain in recent decades.

The essays in this book on Christianity suggest that when women move away from traditional roles as housewives and mothers they become less – or less conventionally – religious. But does this apply to Muslim women? Hussain, Schmidt, Ramji and Bracke all argue that young women live out their religiosity in public, not just private, contexts, and that young Muslim women's religiosity depends on their late modern context for its vibrancy. Their religiosity is constructed, even enhanced, through technology, especially the internet, and the educational opportunities available to them in an individualistic liberal democracy. In fact, the quest to display 'authentic' or 'real' Islam encourages them out of the private family to practice their

religion through study groups, academic reading and internet forums in the more public arena. Some of the most radical consider their parents' more 'cultural' or traditional Islam inferior to their own authentic version.

But there may be specific contextual reasons for young Muslims' radicalization that do not extend beyond the immediate local or national milieu. In the British context, as Chambers (2006: 337) puts it, the marginalization of Muslims by some in the media and political realms 'appear[s] to be strengthening, rather than weakening, minority self-consciousness and, by extension, religious consciousness.' It seems, as several of our authors comment, that the broader international context of anti-Muslim sentiment since 9/11 has been a significant factor in this radicalization.

Women react differently to the challenges of late modernity, but where they are attracted to religion, it is generally because it reinforces or helps them cope with their negotiation of daily life. Religion can break down the dualistic split of public/private and create a 'thirdspace'. The term 'thirdspace' has been used by various theorists, notably in the field of geography.⁹ We use it to mean those spaces (physical, mental, social) which may be described as both/neither spaces; that is, spaces which are not easily categorisable as, for example, entirely public or private spaces. A theme of this book is that such spaces are particularly prevalent for women and the women who use them often conceptualize them in this way even when others might not.

Woodhead (2005; see also Marler in this volume and Hakim 2000: 158) employs a typology of three groups of women to explain women's different attitudes to religion. The first group consists of women whose primary role is in the home. Some may engage in part-time employment, but if they do, their jobs tend to be in the caring sector. The second group is termed 'jugglers' or 'adapters'. These women combine paid employment with caring for their family. The third group is work-centred. They are primarily committed to paid employment, often in traditionally male fields.

The first group, home-centred women, Woodhead claims, is most often found in traditional religion, especially Christianity. They are least likely to abandon traditional religion because it validates and reinforces their position. However, the situation is probably not so clear-cut. Women who are full-time wives and mothers may not perceive their position as 'private' in the way some have viewed it. For them, it is a locus of both public and private: where friends and relations meet,

⁹ Bhabha has employed this term in his work in postcolonial studies to denote the cultural practices (culture is primarily spatial for Bhabha) of hybridized populations (specifically immigrant and displaced populations) in making their new space home. The identities of immigrant and displaced persons are composed of both a new identity and their old identities and so are both and neither – hence they create spaces that may be called 'third space' (Papoulias 2004: 55, Bhabha 1990a and b). Soja is a geographer who has also used the term, notably in his 1996 book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*. Latham (2004: 272) summarizes Soja's very different use of the term as referring to both a 'spatialized trialectic' method of analysis and 'the particular texture of everyday lived spaces that exceeds the compartmentalized knowledges of the conventional social sciences'. In both cases, the definition of 'thirdspace' remains slippery. We choose to use the term 'thirdspace', rather than 'third space' as we think it more reflective of the experience of intersecting boundaries.

where tradespeople visit, children constantly cross boundaries, and where they move around in 'public' spaces of their community such as school, shops, etc. (Rose 1993). It is not, then, that religion here is privatized, so much as that religion is able to accommodate these women's differing experiences of public and private. Morgan (2002) and Wright (2002) have suggested that the church is a third sphere, both public and private, where women often do 'feminine' work (cleaning, decorating, pastoral care etc.). We contend also that traditionally religious women are likely to only comply with traditional religion so long as they are content and able to conform to its ideal construction of women's place as wife-and-mother, as Marler, Aune and Sharma show in their chapters; Bhopal (1998) has found something similar in the case of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women. For example, although many women desire to become wives and mothers, the gender imbalance in churches renders this an impossible ideal. Women who remain in traditional religion thus assert their agency in that choice, and some are actively reshaping their religion according to their own ideas of authenticity.

Women who 'juggle' the public and private, who work both outside and inside the home, are the most likely to insist upon forms of religiosity that reflect their experience of intersecting boundaries. Alternative forms of spirituality do this very well. Even the title of Siân Reid's recent book (2006), *Between the Worlds: Readings in Contemporary Neopaganism*, reflects the neo-pagan preoccupation with creating various forms of thirdspace. However, those women involved with liberal Christianity may also be reshaping religion to suit their experience, as in Vincett's chapter on 'Fusers'. These religions, being less rigid in dogma and praxis, may be more amenable to incorporating 'spirituality' than other forms of traditional religion. It is perhaps these women who most challenge secularization theories in that they are not doing the expected either when they leave the church or when they stay – that is, they are blurring boundaries between what have been treated as fixed categories: religion/spirituality, public/private, religious/secular. For the traditional and the juggling women, the home blurs distinctions between religious and secular by incorporating meditation or shrine rooms or space, and having church groups or religious classes meet in the home.

The women least likely to be involved with religion, and thus most secularized, are those for whom the construction of public/private is strongest. They are the women most likely to be involved in full-time and professional careers. These women are least likely to blur the boundaries between home and work (as do the 'jugglers') or to experience their homes as anything other than 'private' (as women that are more 'traditional' are apt to do). These women are least likely to inhabit thirdspace.

Security and embodiment

Danièle Hervieu-Léger contends that 'it has become clear that belief proliferates in proportion to the uncertainty caused by the pace of change in all areas of social life' (2006: 59), which is another way of summarizing the differences we see between the religiosity of different groups of women. Similarly, Norris and Inglehart argue that people who feel least secure, whether there are threats to their personhood, family

or community, are the most likely to be religious (2004, 2006). These theses fit quite well with women's situation. Western women's detraditionalization – their transition from home-making to self-making – requires them to grapple continually with issues surrounding their personhood (as Marler and Woodhead show in this collection). Even women who seem least threatened, such as traditional stay-at-home mothers, must still negotiate these issues. Several studies (Houtman and Aupers, Reid, Vincett) indicate that where a woman lives a counter-cultural life or has counter-cultural politics, such as lesbians or spiritual feminists, she may be attracted to alternative spiritualities, to help her cope with and to reaffirm her position (see Houtman and Aupers in this book). Her lifestyle and politics may become bound up with her religiosity, so that, once again, the distinction between boundaries is fuzzy.

For women the notion of boundaries is charged in another important way. 'Woman' is not an abstract concept. Women are embodied, and their experiences of embodiment are bound up with spatial experiences and boundaries. For example, when a woman is excluded from certain positions or spaces in a church or mosque, she experiences her position through her body – and her body may be given as the reason for her spatial position. As Kim Knott points out, we all negotiate boundary issues in our everyday embodiment: our bodies are 'at once subject, object and tool, a means by which we engage with things' (2006: 133). Where, for example, do our bodies end and the world begin? This is a question particularly charged for women who have been associated with the natural and whose embodied independence has often been subverted by dominant constructions of 'woman'. But women have also written positively about their experiences of blurred embodied boundaries, in making love, or in pregnancy and breastfeeding, (Miller-McLemore 1992) and some feminists have attempted to write theo/theologies based upon such blurred boundaries (Miller-McLemore 1992; Raphael 1996; Heyward 1989).

Women's embodiment and boundaries reappear throughout this text. Women's bodies are central to their religious and spiritual experiences, and are 'often the conflicting site of both giving in to, as well as resisting, dominant constructions' (Thapan 1997: 11). A woman experiences her body, sexuality and identity as a social being located within a certain cultural context with its dominant values and norms (Thapan 1997). Sharma shows in her chapter that the traditional Christian message that church communities inscribe on women's sexuality results in embodied experiences of shame and guilt for young women who challenge this message and become sexually active. Such is the case in Aune's chapter on single Christian women who confront marriage and family as defining norms for women who join the church.

Moreover, women's bodies are material realities that are made meaningful through social relations, interactions, practices and spaces. How women choose to live out the realities and meanings that their bodies present are threaded through the narratives of the women in these empirical studies. The moves women make to live out their embodied religious and spiritual subjectivities, nevertheless, exist between subversion and compliance, and always in relation to prevailing social constructions. Woodhead demonstrates in her chapter how women's work of care that creates holistic spiritual practices is lived through the body creating spiritual connection and community with other women. Likewise, Vincett and Reid illustrate

that the female body is vital to the rituals, images and experiences of neo-paganism, Goddess Feminism and fused spirituality, challenging mainstream masculine imaged monotheism. The embodied spiritual experiences of these women confront the dualisms that have often defined traditional Christianity. Jackson and Scott argue that women's embodied subjectivities 'entail embodied selves engaged in embodied social activity and embodied interaction...the body is inseparable from the totality of the self' (2001: 19). The papers in this volume suggest that the non-separation of the body, the spatial, the social and the religious is a major theme in women's spirituality.

Whether the habit, hijab or niqab, women's religious clothing is another way that women embody and mark sacred differentiation in their lived contexts. Significantly, both Muslim and Christian women's clothing is a way that they mark their religiosity and embody sacred space. By publicly marking their sacred difference they challenge conventionalities concerning bodily appearance, revealing the tensions that are present within western society when religion is lived on and through the body. Moreover, women's bodies are sites where boundaries blur, where tradition and non-tradition are lived out, where the secular and the sacral converge.

Outline and summary

Penny Marler's chapter sets the scene for the empirical section on Christian women. Her quantitative analysis demonstrates how changing family, social and work contexts have affected women's involvement with and participation in traditional church. Due to the process of secularization and the turn to individualization, Marler perceives woman's role as moving 'from home-making to self-making', impacting women's affiliation to the church (they are attending less) and the places where they cultivate self and spiritual care.

Kristin Aune reveals the tensions between traditional gendered roles in church and single women's desire to be considered as equals in the evangelical church. In her ethnographic study of a congregation, she contends that single women's status is an 'abnormal' standing in the face of church values that endorse marital and familial roles as normative. Single women's attempts to negotiate these norms often result in their marginalization, causing many to disaffiliate from church.

Sonya Sharma shows how a marital-confined sexuality is a Protestant Christian ideal that can conflict with young women's developing sexual selves. Through interview data she captures how young women negotiate and confront sexual desire and experiences whilst involved in conservative church communities. Some remain within the church, but those who decide to leave do so because the church's traditional ideals for sex and gender no longer fit with their evolving sexual identities.

Marta Trzebiatowska's chapter focuses on women who subvert secularized feminine norms of marriage and family to join religious orders in Poland, whilst at the same time the traditional gendered roles within their families equip them for a convent lifestyle. Becoming a nun is a distinct life path, a woman's shaping of her own life. The religious identities that these women choose to adopt confront the secularization that surrounds them and marginalizes them.

Evident in these chapters is women's varying relationship to the church because of the impact of secularization: secularization permeates into women's religious identities. Women's religious identities are no longer synonymous to their relationship with a husband or children; a woman can be self-identified (Webster 1996). The options women have to create a life of their own means that they no longer have to give way to a feminine piety that clashes with their vocational and personal goals. On the one hand, women are prompted to seek sources outside of traditional church to have their spiritual and personal needs met, while on the other, women are looking for opportunities within traditional religion to fit with their evolving selves and life change. An underlying question of this section is whether the church can adapt to women's changing lives.

The section of this book entitled 'Alternative Spiritualities' looks at gender and the rise of neo-paganism and holistic spiritualities. Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers provide evidence of the spread of spirituality into the mainstream and link it to the detraditionalization of women's lives. This helps to explain the gender gap in alternative spiritualities, in that alternative spiritualities attract those – women – whose identities are shifting most rapidly. Houtman and Aupers refute the claim that the New Age is so diverse as to be a kind of pick-and-mix religion; they point out that it may be individualized but it still comprises shared beliefs.

Sîan Reid argues that feminist spiritualities such as feminist Wicca and Goddess Feminism offer women a route toward the 'reenchantment' of secularized modernity: 'Individuals who are dissatisfied with this fundamental divorce must find a way to re-embed moral relevance into the process of living'. Further, religious communities, praxis, myth and symbolism found within alternative feminist spiritualities revalue women's experiences in late modernity. She argues that this positive revaluation in large part explains the growth of such spiritualities.

Giselle Vincett presents her research on a group of (mainly) women she calls 'Fusers'. This group fuses neo-paganism with Christianity, and as such, represents one way that women who stay within Christianity are changing the religion to positively incorporate their experiences and values. Those who fuse from outside of Christianity demonstrate a way to retain links with Christianity despite leaving the churches. The Fusers are an example of a religiosity based upon the crossing and fusing of normally segregated forms of religion.

Linda Woodhead examines the changes that have occurred in women's lives in the West since the 1960s and argues that these changes have often been 'confusing and contradictory'. Women who work outside the home, continue to be the primary caregivers *and* shoulder the majority of domestic work are the segment of the population most likely to be involved with holistic spiritualities to offset the stresses of juggling multiple and sometimes conflicting responsibilities.

These authors argue that although the flight from Christianity exists, women do not necessarily cease to believe or practice. They also take issue with the view that alternative spiritualities are too individualized to be coherent and too diffuse to be significant. Taken together, the three chapters suggest that women's religiosity in alternative spiritualities, although formed within the context of secularization, differs from traditional constructions of a secularized worldview, perhaps because of differing gendered experience. As such, they contend, women involved with such

spiritualities challenge the gendered, dualistic and Christocentric construction of secularization theories.

Serena Hussain's chapter opens the Islam section with quantitative data from recent UK surveys. Muslim women are more likely to be married, to have more children, and to be primarily occupied in the home rather than in paid work outside it. Muslim women's religiosity can therefore be linked to their role in the domestic arena, where they teach faith to their children, and where Islam 'provides a strong enough alternative and forum against the disenchantment resulting through exposure to the public sphere'. Yet evidence also suggests that when women's exposure to the public sphere increases, their religious commitment remains, even strengthens; indeed, younger, educated women's embrace of the hijab can be understood as an attempt to assert a strong Islamic identity in the public realm.

Like some others in this volume, Sarah Bracke is critical of the secularization paradigm as one which upholds masculine rationality and 'does...poorly in accounting for religious women's lives and subjectivities.' Where theorists have equated religion with irrationality and marginality, Bracke explores how young pious Muslim women in Kazan negotiate the discourses of secularization. Presenting themselves as modern, knowledgeable, 'real' Muslims they challenge hegemonic notions and binaries associated with secularization and religion.

Some of the themes in Hussain and Bracke's chapters recur in Rubina Ramji's. Ramji challenges the earlier reading of second generation immigrant Muslims as simply adapting to western culture and in the process secularizing. Based on research with 58 young Canadian women whose parents had migrated to Canada before their birth or during their early childhood, Ramji reports a significant religiosity among many of them. Second generation immigrants, she says, engage in 'not a process of assimilation, but rather of negotiation'.

As a consequence of secularization, those who have been most religious have generally been those most involved with the private realm – women. But it is also true that women's religious activities pose a challenge to the assumed absence of religion from the public sphere. This is the case for Muslim women, whose expressions of religion may begin at home but often move into the public realm. Garbi Schmidt describes the way Muslim women in the United States work to enlarge the public spaces available to them for religious practice, for example by defending their faith and working for women's rights in non-domestic spaces, by embracing the veil (marking them as free from the western preoccupation with appearance) and by creating internet sites showcasing their progressive work for Muslim women's participation.

Conclusion

Further work needs to be done in the sociology of religion in theorizing women's religiosity. We offer this volume as contributing to the first steps in gendering one of the key concerns of the sociology of religion. Considering ways to analyse and report the degree of women's spiritual and religious activity – and disaffiliation from religion – are areas where more research is needed. With respect to secularization, future scholars might investigate how secularization and sacralization are impacted

not only by gender but also by ethnicity, social class, sexuality, ability and age. The gendered nature of secularization or sacralization within other world religions should also be taken forward. The study of ‘men as men’ and their specific, gendered relation to secularization and religion will be a useful topic for exploration. This is the case not least because men’s departure from the Christian churches has been at least as great as women’s. One of the themes of this book concerns the spatial location of women, another under-explored area in the sociology of religion. Closer examination of the interconnections between politics, gender and secularization/sacralization is an area we hope others will take forward.

Finally, it is worth restating the key theses of this book. Secularization occurs but at different levels and contexts. It is strongly related to women’s changing roles in western societies. Traditional religiosity survives especially among women whose lives take place principally in the domestic arena, while women who have entered professional careers are least likely to stay traditionally religious. Between these two extremes lie women who might be called ‘jugglers’, who integrate the domestic and public domains. These women are most likely to move into new forms of spirituality and religiosity.

The modes of belief of the women in this volume are neither secular nor sacral, but both. Women are leaving the churches but are also numerically dominant in various forms of religion, especially the newer forms of alternative spiritualities. It is therefore important to recognize the simultaneous appearance of manifestations of decline and of growth or transformation; this means it may be as appropriate and significant to speak of sacralization as of secularization. This is core to secularization debates, but takes specific forms when women’s religious experiences are considered. Moreover, this tension is related to our central paradox: women are the majority of religious adherents, but women’s disaffection from religion is also an important social phenomenon.

Women, to lesser or greater extents, live in and create what we have termed ‘thirdspace’. In this sense – that women do religious work within the public sphere; that religion refuses to be confined to the domestic arena – religious women’s faith-inspired activities seem to be questioning the idea that secularization renders public religiosity insignificant. Women pose a challenge to secularization theories: we must go beyond one-size-fits-all theories to understand the complex interconnections between women, religion and secularization in the West.

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