

**Women's Journeys in the Study of Religion: Adventures in Gender,
Postmodernism, Postcolonialism and Globalization**

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ABSTRACT

In 1995, Professor Ursula King published an edited volume, *Religion and Gender*. This volume comprised a collection of essays that had been presented at the International Association of the History of Religions (IAHR) conference in Rome, 1990. As such, it marked a milestone: it was the first published volume that featured work undertaken solely by women in the history of the IAHR. In her own Introduction, Professor King drew attention to a number of important topics, such as 'gender', 'postmodernism', that were being debated at that time. The volume remains a testament to Professor King, and her dedication to, as well as support of women's scholarship in the discipline on the Study of Religions, and to what was then called Comparative Religion. A subsequent volume, edited together with Tina Beattie, *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross Cultural Perspectives* (2004), addressed more complex issues that had emerged in the intervening years. This later volume provided another platform from which to explore not only developments in gender, but a number of other crucial topics, including postcolonialism and globalization. In this essay, I propose to follow the effects of such issues as addressed or acknowledged by Professor King in her various works, as well as to examine the further expansion and qualification of these topics in more recent years. This essay will thus explore issues that have had a formative and even decisive influence on the way that women scholars in the Study of Religions today approach the discipline. I will look to certain of my own essays that appeared in Professor King's edited volumes as well as essays by other contemporary women scholars in order to illustrate these developments.

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Introduction

In an essay published in 1996, 'Religion in a New Key', Professor Ursula King made an extremely perceptive remark when she described various dimensions that interacted with the notion of gender as it existed at that time. She observed these dimensions would need to be taken into account in any future gender analyses. She recognized that gender informed both social relationships and many other facets of human existence, including religion. She further qualified this observation by declaring that: '[G]ender is only a partial factor of explanation for social reality and religious life, because it intersects and is interstructured with other factors such as race, class, ethnicity, generational, cultural and other human differences' (1996, 13). Such an analysis anticipated to a remarkable extent what is today termed as 'intersectionality'.¹ Professor King also declared in her 'Introduction: Gender and the Study of Religion', that an examination of gender and 'cultural variables' (1995, 5) could lead to 'a new breakthrough in the history of human consciousness' (1995, 5). She also made a recommendation: 'A new critical gender awareness study of religion requires that we seek a new, more differentiated and, at the same time, inclusive definition of what it means to be human' (ibid. 9). These remarks were especially pertinent for the tasks that Professor King foresaw as part of an agenda to be accomplished. This vision, if enacted, would realize a new era for women scholars in the field of the Study of Religions.

Throughout most of human history there has been an oppressive, unjust symmetry in the relations of power, representation, knowledge and scholarship between men and women. Feminist critical theory and analysis have shown that it is necessary and liberating to examine the lenses of gender which are so deeply embedded in our cultural discourses and social institutions.... In a process of critical self-reflexivity we have to ask ourselves what these lenses are and what they do to our humanity – how they possibly distort our full potential for being human. (1996, 11)

Such prescient comments laid the groundwork for more detailed future investigations of gender relations and regimes² as they became relevant for religion. Basically, Professor King agreed with the formula that gender was a 'cultural construct', but it required more critical appraisal. At this stage however, she was not yet prepared to propose its future, but allowed it would entail major repercussions. At that time, however, Professor King could not

¹ Intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) as legal analytic category initially concerned with African-American women in an effort to discern the specific modes of interaction of race, class, and gender, etc., in different regions and contexts. It has since expanded beyond the boundaries of African-American women to a much wider application.

² The term 'gender regime', was introduced by R.W. Connell in a book *Gender and Power*, initially published in 1987 and revised in a 2005 article. It is a term that is useful in mapping the gender arrangements in an institution, and has been helpful in understanding such dynamics in both religion and Religious Studies as a discipline. Connell's describes its function sociologically: 'By the gender regime of an institution we mean the patterning of gender relations in that institution, and especially the continuing pattern, which provides the structural context of particular relationships and individual practices' (2005, 7).

have foreseen the effects that a reconfiguration of the conventional gender binary, with 'masculine' and 'feminine' becoming cultural constructs would introduce.³ It was the work of Judith Butler, especially *Gender Trouble* (1990), that challenged the existent gender regimes that dictated the terms not only of sexual dimorphism but also of hetero-normativity. Reverberations from Butler's iconoclastic recasting of gender as a cultural construct still continue today, though Butler has since qualified certain of her initial claims and their misinterpretations. (These developments are discussed later in this essay.)

In 2002, Professor King published another article, 'Is there a Future for Religious Studies as we Know It?' in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Here she made a further significant announcement by acclaiming women's new-found participation in the discipline of Religious Studies. She declared: 'In the past, the role, image, and status of women in different religions have sometimes been an object of male scholarly enquiry, but now women themselves have become subjects and agents of scholarly analysis' (2002, 372). It was also in this article that she referred the influence of postmodernism, viewing it as being closely related to the changes that were being wrought by the new gender insights (ibid. 371) Her principal insight was that

Postmodernism has dislodged the autonomous subject, but it has also undermined the false claims of a disinterested objectivity that has distanced and alienated human subjectivity from its very object, from specifically human ways of knowing, which are relational and dialogical, even when the dialogue remains an inner one within the thinking subject. (ibid. 371)

Professor King viewed postmodernism as allowing new aspects of religious subjectivity to become acceptable in the study of religion. This encouraged an emendation of previous absolutist and essentialist pronouncements that had rejected subjective views and emotive expressions as 'feminine' and thus lacking in substance. In contrast, postmodernism permitted critical assessments of universalist and objectivist definitions which had previously held sway. As a result, the former androcentric bias evident in traditional religious doctrines and edicts were questioned and even refuted. It was in her *General Introduction to Gender and Diversity*, entitled 'Gender-Critical Turns in the Study of Religion', that Professor King charted an exacting course that she then envisaged. She remarked:

The relatively new research perspective on gendered aspects of religion has unearthed a range of new data in the study of past and present religions, and has made religion, as traditionally defined, studied, understood or lived, problematic in a new way. In other words, the consistent application of critical gender perspectives poses awkward questions for established religious authorities and practices, and thereby challenges and destabilizes religions as traditionally lived

³ In current terms of sexual orientation and 'gender identity' there is no longer a definitive allocation in accordance with physiology, but a number of gender variations, with the acronym 'LGBTQ2+' serving as an indicator of the current principal identities.

and practised, as well as previous research and writing on religions as a field of historical scholarship. (2004, 8)

With this pronouncement Professor King expresses a deep awareness of the monumental shift that is taking place. It is also evidence of her support and encouragement of fellow women scholars in religion who were contributing to this 'consciousness revolution'. From this perspective, Professor King was a trailblazer in the study of women and religion.

Initial Excursions in Gender

One way that occurred to me as a means of reflecting on the resultant explorations in gender, as response to Professor King's summons, was to revisit the essays that I had written for her two edited volumes in 1995 and 2004 respectively, that were mentioned above. It now seems that I was somewhat presumptuous when I first proposed to make a presentation in the conference in Rome, 1990, entitled 'God and Gender: Women's Invocations on the Divine', which was published in King's 1995 volume. This was because, in the first instance, I am not a theologian. The second was that I tended to be imprecise in my use of the term 'gender'. I was not alone in this failing as many other women at that time associated the term principally with women. Yet something extremely innovative was starting to emerge in the work of women scholars in religion that I believed needed to be documented.

In the essay on 'God and Gender', my principal impulse was to investigate the alternative proposals on the nature of God that religiously oriented women had proposed in the years since 1970 onwards. This was neither a definitive nor exhaustive account of women's shifting viewpoints, but a survey of certain of the more dissident suggestions that were recommended – especially with reference to the gender of God. The paper was also not intended as an evaluative exercise. What had become obvious was that a paternalistic god-figure, forged in the image of ideals that were alien to women's own experiences, was being summarily rejected. My main intention was to survey such ground-breaking dissent.

Mary Daly's radical writing in *Beyond God the Father* (1973) could be considered as initiating this contemporary rebellion, with a specific reference to Catholicism. She proposed that God was no longer to be considered as a male-gendered noun, but a verb – a modality of Be-ing. Such a change placed an emphasis on engaging with God as a 'dynamic process', rather than revering a static anthropomorphic figure. Daly exhorted:

Why indeed must 'God' be a noun? Why not a verb – the most active and dynamic of all? The anthropomorphic symbols for God may be intended to convey personality, but they fail to convey that God is Be-ing. Women now who are experiencing the shock of nonbeing and the surge of self-affirmation against this are inclined to perceive transcendence as the Verb in which we participate – live, move, and have our being. (1973, 33–34)

The hierarchical structures that had dominated a patriarchal system with its ordinances and prohibitions were also summarily dismissed by Daly. A somewhat similar non-personalist viewpoint was proclaimed by Elizabeth Dodson Gray in 1988 when she described god as a vital presence which fostered interrelationship. Dodson Gray was one of the first to bring an ecological dimension into serious reflection, with a focus on a process of interrelationship which she likened it to an 'ecological web'.

We live in a totally interconnected system, and the truth is that we would disintegrate in the life system without such things as gravity, electromagnetic fields, without all that holds both planets and electrons, the very large and very small, in their orbits.... What I invite you now to do is take off your hierarchical-ranking eyeglasses and put aside your patriarchal vision so that we may all join with other species and come inside the circle of creation, and join the great dance. (1988, 54–55)

Other women scholars, such as Carol Christ, abandoned Christianity altogether. In appealing to ancient goddesses, Christ regarded them as embodying the qualities of strength and self-affirmation that centuries of neglect and subservice had denied to women. She extolled the benefits of reclaiming the Goddess.

The symbol of Goddess has much to offer women who are struggling to be rid of the 'powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations' of devaluation of female power, denigration of the female body, distrust of female will, and denial of women's bonds and heritage that have been engendered by patriarchal religion. As women struggle to create a new culture in which women's power, bodies, will, and bonds are celebrated, it seems natural that the Goddess would re-emerge as symbol of the newfound beauty, strength, and power of women. (1979, 286)

Rosemary Ruether was not particularly impressed by such an appeal to ancient goddesses. Nonetheless, she pronounced her preference for a type of mediating figure that was not a stand-alone god or a goddess. She evoked a presence that featured as a primal and somewhat indefinite figure. It provided a 'source of energy' that infused life with peace and harmony. Ruether appealed to this multifaceted presence with diverse names that comprise a virtual registry of supportive religious images and affiliations that inhabit such a peaceable kingdom. Among these symbols included was: 'She, a feminine Matrix'.

To return Home; to learn the harmony, the peace, the justice of body, bodies in right relation to each other. The whence we have come and whither we go, not from alien skies but here, in the community of earth. Holy One, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will done on earth. All shall sit under their own vines and fig trees and none shall be afraid. The lion will lay down with the lamb and the little child will lead them. A new thing is revealed; the woman will encompass the warrior. Thou shalt not hurt, thou shalt not kill in all my holy mountain.

The Shalom of the Holy; the disclosure of the gracious *Shekinah*; Divine Wisdom; the empowering Matrix; She, in whom we live and move and have our being – She comes; She is here. (1983, 266)

Judith Plaskow, a critic of traditional Judaism, in *Standing Again at Sinai* (1991), provided an incentive for fellow feminists to achieve that would permit the full presence of women in the Jewish religious community. She declared: 'As I see it, the goal of a Jewish feminist approach to God-language is to incorporate women's God-wrestling into the fullness of Torah by finding images that can communicate and evoke the experience of the presence of God in a diverse, egalitarian, and empowered community of Israel' (1990, 122). Central to Plaskow's approach was a reintroduction of theology into Judaism, in order to supplement the three foundational articles of Torah, Israel and God. Plaskow also presented a mode of God as co-creator with whom humans co-operate in the formation and nurturing of life. In her project, Plaskow did not sanction the worship of goddesses, nor did she refer to Christian models of the divine. She does, however, view her own orientation as participating in a concerted attempt by religiously-minded women to reject dualist frameworks that have banished women from full participation in religious ceremonies, education in sacred scriptures, and also in constructive debate.

Yet there were other women scholars who were not receptive to this revisionary movement. These critics had adopted postmodern and deconstructive theories and rejected the new divine attributions as were suggested by the above women revisionists. Sheila Greeve Devaney in her article, 'Problems with Feminist Theory: Historicity and the Search for Sure Foundations' (1987), was one of the first to find fault with women's innovative depictions of god. Greeve Devaney criticized these women proposing idealized versions of god allegedly derived from their own experience. Other women critics of a postmodernist disposition deconstructed such subjective appeals arguing that they were merely mirror-images of the dominant male version of the divine. Another charge was that such images perpetuated sexual dimorphism. The resultant debates often degenerated into somewhat simplistic exchanges where adherents of constructivism belittled essentialism. Yet what was actually at stake involved quite different and serious issues concerning both women's identity and agency. There were allegations that the invocations of spiritual or metaphysical models appeared to foreclose any serious investigations of the material conditions that dictated the terms of women's actual agency. It has taken many years of subsequent struggle to discern the ways that such divergent views can begin to hear and inform each other. Elizabeth Clark's excellent essay (2001) provides a very detailed and cogent overview of these developments that have taken many years to negotiate.

Gender Perplexities

What is of most interest for this present context, however, is the role of 'gender' as a term of reference in these complex interactions. It seems especially relevant to examine the charge that a gender binary division still

lingered in the proclamations of many women who rejected the masculinity of a paternal god figure. My own attempt to resolve some of these issues was published in 2006 article, entitled: 'Gender and Religion: A Volatile Mixture'. It reflected an extensive, though not comprehensive, library and on-line search. My conclusion was that the books and articles written in the years between 1992 and 2005 revealed little consistency in the way the term 'gender' was used. In fact, there were at least thirty variations in meaning. The only obvious conclusion was that word 'gender' was no longer confined to its original demarcation as an indicator of separate appropriate characteristics and behaviours for men and women. In these disparate writings, the term 'gender' was indiscriminately employed, exhibiting a variety of positive and negative appraisals.

'Gender criticism', a term that was influenced by postmodernism, examining the construction of gender and sexuality was particularly evident. Judith Butler's books on gender were also influential, though aspects of her early work had been misconstrued. Thus, while Butler admits that gender remains a contentious site, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) she also concedes that her initial notion of gender as sheer performativity (1990) was misinterpreted. Critics charged that gender resulted simply from a whimsical daily choice of apparel by a person who controlled their own gender identity (1993, x). By choosing the title, *Bodies that Matter*, Butler insists her specific intention is that of recognizing the multiple cultural and social forces that interfere with the process of gender identification in harmful ways. Butler emphasizes the need to protect the physical or material body from exclusion and abuse that could result from an inappropriate choice. This would be especially applicable in numerous societies where religious gender rules of heteronormativity still prevail, and violations of such normative decrees are forbidden (1993, x–xi). In adapting Butler's work to religion, Elaine Graham, in *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood and Theology* (1995), has appealed to Butler's work, especially its move of 'parodic practices', as a way of dislodging traditional religions' stark alignment of gender with biological determinism. Instead, Graham recommends that gender be understood as resulting from cultural construction, thus allowing for less exclusive coercion by religion, and also for more amenable attitudes to the intricate interactions of gender, the body and sexuality.

Another discovery emerged from my enquiry into the variations of meaning that describe gender. This was that while there were still many articles that continued to describe gender assignments without any critical awareness, many others made trenchant remarks about religion's continuing control of strict gender roles. Such criticisms could be either implicit or explicit in their gender criticism. These books indicated that a major change was in process. The first example occurred in a book by Joanne Watkins, entitled *Spirited Women: Gender, Religion, and Cultural Identity in the Nepal Himalaya* (1996). Watkins uses the word 'gender' from what, at first glance, is apparently a neutral position, describing the 'egalitarian gender configurations', i.e., the complementary roles and non-hierarchical relations of the Buddhist Nyeshangte peoples of Nepal. Yet Watkins also introduces the term, 'gender variance', where 'male' and 'female' roles are interchangeable, indicating that

such roles need not be sex-specific. From this perspective, Watkins observes that: 'neither men nor women are ... prevented from participating in their society's two central institutions: international trade and Buddhist ritual practice' (p. 16). Watkins' further observation that Nyeshangte women are neither 'denigrated nor regarded as polluting' (17), would not, in itself, seem to be an explicit judgment. Nevertheless, in Watkins' approach, there appears to be an implied comparison with rigid western religious gender roles that prevent such mobility.

A second example by Deborah Sawyer is more explicit. In *God, Gender and the Bible* (2002), Sawyer adapts the ideas of Judith Butler, especially the qualified concept of gender as 'performative' (Butler, 1993, pp. x–xii). Sawyer's explicit intention is to question conventional gender roles that are prescribed in the Bible. In keeping with Butler, Sawyer believes that a strategic disruption needs to be initiated to disturb these mandated ideals. In this endeavour, Sawyer also employs Luce Irigaray's device of critical mimesis from *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985). This tactic, as deployed by Irigaray reveals the control mechanisms of gendered regimes, especially in their privileging of the male position – be it of an intellectual, religious, or social nature (Irigaray, 1985, 76). Sawyer employs both these approaches to unsettle fixed gendered categories and introduce a more tolerant mode of gender identification. In addition, sexuality is also released from its primary association with procreative functions. These adaptations introduce modes of gender identity that are no longer confined by rigid strict biological categories.

Such gender explorations, with their postmodern connections, challenged the current modes of expression of gender identity. In recent years, there have been writings of many women scholars in religion who do not subscribe to heteronormativity, and who have written discerning volumes on this topic. (See the work of Rudy (1988); McClintock Fulkerson (2007); Jakobsen and Pellegrini (2003). All of these works are indeed fulfilling the outcome of a 'revolution of consciousness' that was earlier predicted by Professor King.

Gender and its Disruptions

These alterations in the meaning of gender were not universally acclaimed, let alone welcomed. Fundamentalist and neo-conservative Christians were not impressed. They also troubled the late Pope John Paul II. Judith Butler was surprised when she learned of the backstage interference by the Vatican during the lead-up to the Fourth World Conference of Women held in Beijing in 1995. Butler describes how, as part of their manoeuvring: 'The Vatican not only denounced the term "gender" as a code for homosexuality but insisted that the platform language [of the conference] return to the notion of sex, in an apparent effort to secure a link between femininity and maternity as a naturally and divinely ordained necessity (Butler, 2001, 423). The underlying fear was that homosexuality would lead to an increase in the number of genders. Joan Wallach Scott, an American historian and theorist, also reported on the Vatican's moves and another occurrence in the United States' House of Representatives in the Fall of 1995. Here a sub-committee entertained submissions that warned morality and family values were under attack by

'gender feminists' (Scott, 1999 [1988], ix). The conservative opponents of the word 'gender' further claimed that 'gender feminists' regarded manhood and womanhood, motherhood and fatherhood, heterosexuality, marriage, and family as 'culturally created, and originated by men to oppress women' (Scott, 1999, ix). They were well aware that 'gender criticism', had become a rallying call for women who no longer accepted that biology dictated destiny, and who would now assume responsibility for their own decisions, especially in the area of reproduction.

In the following years, however, 'gender', morphed into multiple meanings. A telling indictment of this alteration occurs in the 'Preface to the Revised Edition' of Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* (1999 [1988]). She laments the fact that in the United States 'gender' has become '[A]n aspect of "ordinary usage", routinely offered as a synonym for women, for the difference between the sexes, for sex' (1999, xii). Scott then states that she has abandoned using the word, 'gender', because it has lost its 'radical edge' (ibid. xii). This does not mean that critiques of determinate gender roles have ceased – but subtle and not so subtle changes in its usage have affected the way that 'gender' has been allocated. More recently, 'gender' is regarded as a variable mode of identification among other qualifications that function in an approach termed 'intersectionality'. Introduced by an African-American legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), it is basically applied today as a sociological approach that involves taking into account the interweaving variations of gender, race, age, class, and religion in a particular location, especially those involving minorities. This is certainly a refinement that tries to avoid universal or essentialist assumptions and decisions in evaluating the situations of women. It has not yet been applied significantly in study of religions, but the essay written by Sara Salem, 'Feminist Critique and Islamic Criticism: The Question of Intersectionality' (2013), does illustrate both its possibilities and its weaknesses. It is, however, a particularly fascinating undertaking to compare this development with the recent amendments that have been made to postcolonialism and, latterly, to globalization.

Postcolonialism and Globalization

Another domain where Professor King anticipated future topics was in her early reflections on the effects of colonialism and the need for inclusion of other peoples and religions from different regions of the world. In her edited book, *Gender and Religion* (1995), Professor King was vitally concerned that the study of religions, particularly where it included women, should not be confined to the limited and somewhat parochial studies of what was then termed 'First-World' countries. Instead, Professor King appealed to a mode of ecumenical 'globalization' that incorporated a spiritual dimension. It thus differed from the mode of globalization which has since developed with links to neo-liberalism and exploitation of the less-advantaged peoples of the world. At the same time, Professor King also envisioned a future – though its actual details were not developed – when a distinctive move in the study of religions would result in 'a wider focus on religion and gender where the field is enlarged to include critically reflected data about both sexes' (1995, 30). Both

of these observations were indicative of the narrow confines that had informed the study of religions in its formative period.

During the past fifty years, however, numerous books and essays have witnessed to the fact that, in the initial stages of studying other religions, the prevailing methods tended to reduce the religion being discussed to concepts and methods initiated mainly by western, Christian, male conventions of scholarship. Countless distortions, if not fabrications, of important aspects in other religious traditions resulted. In the interim, many of these misrepresentations have been documented by postcolonial critics, e.g., P.J. Marshall (1970); Paul Almond (1988); David Chidester (1996; 2014); Enrique Dussel (2004); Donald Lopez (1998); Richard King (1999), Urban (1999). It was not until the early twentieth century, that a significant number of books were published by women on the topic of postcolonialism and religion, e.g., Donaldson (2002); Donaldson and Kwok (2001); Dube (2002); Eaton and Lorentzen (2003); Kwok Pui-Lan (2005); Marcos (2006); and Joy (1995); 2004; 2006; 2012). In this connection, although their concern was not primarily that of religion, the influence of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987; 1988) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984), needs to be acknowledged. Not only were they among the most prominent women scholars in the beginnings of postcolonialist scholarship, but they have both since revised their work so as to engage with the incursions of globalization in Mohanty (2002; 2003; 2013; 2015) and Spivak (2004).

It was also during the years of feminist studies in religion in the late 1970s, however, that protests were initiated by women of colour, by indigenous peoples, and by marginalized groups, principally articulated by those who lived in countries colonized by European powers. They realized that they had been portrayed primarily by male scholars whose methods reflected their own cultural biases, which exhibited tendencies of reductionism and/or gratuitous projection. They began to question the obstacles that had prevented them from assessing their own situations. Postcolonial studies interrogated the 'Eurocentric mind-set', with its objectively inclined philosophical and methodological presuppositions. Other imposed ideals, such as 'truth' in the context of religion, and 'civilization' in connection with correct behaviour and practices, were also examined.

In the essay, 'Postcolonialism and Gendered Reflections: Challenges to Religious Studies' (2004), my contribution to the book edited by Ursula King and Tina Beattie (2004), I introduced the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak. (Because of length constraints, my own focus here will be principally on the work of Talpade Mohanty.) Her essay, 'Under Western Eyes', originally published in 1984, was one of the first to depict the misrepresentations involved in colonialism and its continuing effects, especially on women of the then labelled 'Third World'. She charged: '[The] representation of Woman produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity, or a relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures' (1984, 334). She added a further indictment: '[I]t is only in so far as "Woman/Women" and the "East" are defined as *Others*, or as peripheral, that (Western) Man/Humanism can

represent him/itself as the center' (1984, p. 353). With such striking analyses, Talpade Mohanty's work marked the beginning of critical postcolonial women's scholarship. It also heralded the many of books that would be written by women from South Asia, Africa, and the colonized Americas on this topic in the coming years.

Yet, as time passed, all was not clear sailing with postcolonial studies. Once it became an accepted field of study, mainly in departments of literature in western universities, it underwent an identity crisis. Its academic acceptance worried adherents and, by the year 2000, fierce debates contested the mandate of postcolonialism. Two volumes in particular problematized the field in a number of ways. In her Foreword: 'At the Margins of Postcolonial Studies', to *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (2000), Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks observed that:

[T]he field of postcolonial studies is at present beset by a melancholia induced paradoxically by its newfound authority and incorporation into institutions of higher learning.... [T]his melancholic condition derives not only from postcolonial scholars' apprehension that institutionalizing the critique of imperialism may render it conciliatory, but from other significant factors such as their own (First World) place of speaking ... (which implicates them in the problematic of neocolonialism) ... and their peculiar immobility as an effective oppositional force for curricular change within the (American and British) academies. (2000, 3)

In distinguishing postcolonialism from other recently institutionalized, area-specific topics such as ethnic and/or minority studies, its supporters, like Seshadri-Crooks, wanted to reclaim a distinct evaluative role for postcolonial studies. She wanted it to remain a critical study, located on the margins, though no longer one of an undifferentiated marginality. She proposed:

It may be acceptable to claim that postcolonial studies is concerned more with the analysis of the lived *condition* of unequal power-sharing globally and the self-authorization of cultural, economic and militaristic hegemony than with a particular historical phenomenon such a colonialism which may be plotted as a stage of capitalist imperialism. (ibid. 19)

Seshadri-Crook's comments also reflected the need for a strategy to distinguish and to combat the growth of globalization – which is regarded by some as encroaching on postcolonial territory. This development is also analyzed in a volume entitled *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2006), edited by Ania Loomba and four other editors. In its Introduction, the five editors define their perceptions of the current situation of postcolonialism, specifically in the light of both its recent institutionalization and the intrusion of globalization. They observe:

Postcolonial studies thus finds itself in a peculiar situation, one somewhat analogous to that of theory. It means different things to different people; it is housed in different disciplines yet widely

associated with a few; it is viewed either as enormously radical or as the latest ideological offspring of Western capitalism; it is firmly entrenched in Anglo-US universities, yet its disciplinary status remains in question; it seeks to address the non-Western world yet it is often received with hostility there. (Loomba et al., 2006, 3)

Rather than become embroiled in further internal wrangling about definitional debates, the editors found it more productive 'to move beyond narrow definitions and, frankly, beyond the usual suspects' (ibid. 3). Retaining what was most valuable in the postcolonial critique, they modified their position to address the incursions of globalization with its neo-imperialistic offensives. They concluded that postcolonial studies, though taken to task by some as having become 'staid or inert' (ibid. 5), must maintain both a sharp critical analysis and support counter activities that resist abuses of globalization.

While this summons to action still appeared to concentrate on epistemological issues, Innovative activist implications soon became apparent. These were more insistent in a 2014 publication, *South Asian Feminisms*, again edited by Ania Loomba, with a co-editor, Ritty A. Lukose. Their introductory overview provided details of recent interventions and adaptations. They also attested to their commitment to activist interventions, in addition to theoretical issues, specifically directed at globalization. They state:

South Asian Feminisms builds upon its legacy as it engages complex new challenges to theory and activism that have emerged in recent years. Our contention is that feminist engagements in this region (with its long-standing and cross-cutting histories of colonialism, and women's movements, as well as contemporary struggles around sexuality, religion, war, peace, globalization, and contemporary iterations of empire and the exploitation of labor) can productively enrich the larger horizon. (2014, 1)

An Activist Response to Globalization

The movement toward activism is a particularly intriguing one, together with the continuing emphasis on solidarity and location. As noted earlier, globalization is viewed by many as a contemporary version of colonialism, although it is not necessarily undertaken by nation states but by international business conglomerates, with similar untoward effects. Talpade Mohanty's distress at the incursions of globalization can be clearly discerned in examining her revisions made to her earlier work on 'First' and 'Third-World' women. She has moved toward a more activist model to counter globalization's negative impact on women. She states:

While my earlier focus was on the distinction between 'Western' and 'Third World' feminist practices, and while I downplayed the commonalities between these two positions, my focus is now on what I have chosen to call an anticapitalist transnational feminist practice -- and on the possibilities, indeed the necessities, of cross-national feminist solidarity and organizing against capitalism. (2003, 509)

In redefining her position, Talpade Mohanty concedes her own inevitable involvement with the global forces now shaping the world. She also appreciates that the spheres of influence involved do not necessarily conform so easily to the former East/West divide. She states: 'The "under" of Western eyes is now much more "inside" in terms of my own location in the U.S. academy' [referring to her academic position at Syracuse University (ibid. 499)].⁴ Talpade Mohanty has also become conscious of the way she herself is positioned in her academic career as part of the privileged *One-Third World*, though she is originally from the *Two-Thirds World*. Her location places her in the privileged minority, but her sympathies remain with the vast majority of the *Two-Thirds World*. This awareness has allowed her to appreciate the complexities as well as the commonalities.⁵ Her changed attitude has also led Talpade Mohanty to clarify her understanding of the way that careful contextual analyses of specific locations can now be put into service within a larger global structure for addressing harmful political and economic projects (ibid. 501).

Talpade Mohanty's remarks indicate a move away from simply focussing on the differences – particularly as they had traditionally been expressed in stark binary formulas as East/West. What she now advocates is a mode of transnational political struggle that challenges not simply globalization but also the inroads made by religious fundamentalisms. These latter movements, with their attendant strongly masculinist and racist attitudes – have endeavoured to restrict women's increasing activity in their appeals to women's rights. Her vision of what needs to be achieved is far-reaching.

I wish to better see the processes of corporate globalization and how they recolonize women's bodies and labor. We need to know the real and concrete effects of global restructuring on raced, classed, national, sexual bodies of women in the academy, in workplaces, streets, households, cyberspaces, neighbourhoods, prisons, and social movements. (ibid. 516)

In examining these revisions in the work of Talpade Mohanty since her 1984 essay, one can detect a dramatic change from her previous analysis of the dynamics of appropriation and misrepresentation. It has been replaced by a keen awareness that globalization, despite a few bonuses, has inflicted

⁴ Talpade Mohanty describes her position: 'I no longer live simply under the gaze of Western eyes. I also live inside it and negotiate it every day. I make my home in Ithaca, New York, but always as from Mumbai, India. My cross-race and cross-class work takes me to interconnected places and communities around the world – to a struggle contextualized by women of color and of the Third World, sometimes located in the Two-Thirds World, sometimes in the One-Third. So the borders here are not really fixed' (2003, 530).

⁵ Talpade Mohanty observes: 'I find the language of *One-Third World* versus *Two-Thirds World* as elaborated by Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash (1998) particularly useful' (ibid. 506). Terms such as the First World/Third World or simply East /West are no longer appropriate. It is not even simply a hemispheric problem of North/South – but one of a pervasive state of oppression of minority communities where the conglomerates of the One/Third world exploit the resources of the Two/Thirds, who can be located in both the North and South (ibid. 506).

devastating hardships on many minorities and displaced persons. At the same time, Talpade Mohanty has shifted away from large-scale, standardized definitions that neglect to pay attention to the differentiations of historical context and location. She is attempting to move beyond the crude operations of tired, old clichés. Previous accusations of ‘sameness’ or essentialism, as that which envelops differences or adapts them to its own assimilative designs, are set aside. As a result, instead of designating difference as a theoretical site of reaction, Talpade Mohanty introduces a more concerted programme of activism. She directs attention to finding similarities. These then help to build collaborative strategies, resulting in a more pluralistic position that, while acutely aware of differences, strives to design constructive, collective, and activist responses. Such responses remain acutely sensitive to both differences and similarities in their respective situations. This potent combination, informed by what I have come to appreciate as an ‘ethics of location’, then informs a strategic politics of redress.⁶

Concluding Remarks

It might seem in the above theoretical discussions that, except for Talpade Mohanty’s mention of religious fundamentalism, religion itself as a topic has disappeared. As yet, however, there are very few books that actually address in detail women, globalization, and religion. There is *Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women’s Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts* (2001), edited by J. Bayes and N. Tohidi, which looks at the inroads of fundamentalism. Also, *Religions/Globalizations: Theories and Cases* (2001), edited by Dwight N. Hopkins et al., that mentions women in certain chapters. Saskia Sassen has written on gender in *Globalization and its Discontents* (1998). Then there is the fine volume, edited by Jennifer Reid from a History of Religions approach, *Religion, Postcolonialism, and Globalization: A Sourcebook* (2015), which leaves no doubt that religion is deeply embedded in both colonization and globalization. As yet, no specific book has appeared that examines the ways that women and religion interface with aspects of globalization. Talpade Mohanty’s work would lend itself to facilitating such a volume. Even though her vision and activities in seeking justice appear to be primarily aligned with politics, the immensity of her project would not be conceivable without a deep-rooted commitment to women’s ethical well-being. It is this aspect of her task that has influenced me to come to a conclusion about her inspiration. Only an ethical yearning for righteousness, tempered by an almost infinite concern for justice, can motivate and mobilize such a strong dedication to better the lives of women. (This development would necessarily also include their husbands and children.)

It is with this affirmation that I would like to propose that Professor Ursula King join this conversation to add her own contribution. In *Gender and Religion*, she mentioned how globalization was a process whereby we become conscious of the whole world as a single place, which she posited as ‘a unity created by the bonds of one human family’ (ibid. 30). At that time, Professor

⁶A recent article I wrote on this approach as involving an ‘ethics of location’ has been accepted for publication.

King did not pursue her thoughts in depth. In a more recent book, *The Search for Spirituality* (2009), she does clarify the spiritual dimensions that she now envisions. She states: 'Spirituality needs to be a "global spirituality" – global in the sense that it is both rooted in the earth, and connected to the diversity of peoples, cultures, and faiths around the globe' (ibid. 44). This move implies quite a different position from the neo-liberal exploitations targeted by Talpade Mohanty.

Yet, it is obvious that Professor King is not undertaking a reclamation of Christian dogma nor the ordinances of any other religions. Her transformative version of a 'global spirituality' which supports both a 'global ethic' and a 'global responsibility', is based on the collaboration of different religions and spiritual paths. It does not adhere to rigid, restrictive spiritualities of a fundamentalist persuasion. Such inflexibility would not foster the type of transformation Professor King proposes. She advances a form of spirituality that she believes enhances the global flourishing of all humanity (ibid. 44). At the same time, such a global spirituality needs to be acutely focussed in its quest for 'justice, peace, non-violence, and ecological harmony' (ibid. 11). A very tall order. This is because such activities engage both church and state. Given the contemporary divisive split between religion and secularity, the attainment of such ideals appears virtually unachievable.

Professor King would appear to admit this disparity: 'The goals of modern feminism and the perennial human quest for spirituality seem at first to have little in common' (ibid. 44). This would be especially so when feminism and religion are portrayed as having mutually exclusive agendas. Yet, without any intention of attempting to consolidate their respective allegiances on my part, it seems that feminism and global spirituality do share one goal, although their motives and methods differ. This is that both groups are seeking to establish justice – specifically a justice where all women are accorded an affirmation of the integrity of their very existence. This recognition is far from achievement in many locations of the globe. In a recent article, 'Women, Rights, and Religion' (2013), I surveyed the current situation to understand what were some of the difficulties still being encountered, and what were also noticeable items of progress. I heard a familiar refrain in the responses of feminists: that advancements had been made, but there was still a long, arduous, and intricate worldwide struggle to be negotiated.

Professor King is hopeful, if not optimistic, about the future of global spirituality. Nonetheless, I think that her movement will face comparable obstacles to those of the quest for social justice that Talpade Mohanty continues to pursue. I wish that I could share Professor King's confidence when she states: 'Contemporary thinking has moved from an exclusively feminist and woman-centered approach to a more inclusive re-visioning of gender relations which will have a radical impact on spiritual practice' (2009, 41). This observation echoes an earlier remark in *Religion and Gender* that '[T]he next step in reconstruction will be an additional phase of integration where female and male gender issues are brought into fruitful relationship with each other' (1995, 30). In the intervening years, however, complexity and dissension have marked the changes undergone by 'gender' and its variations

in relation to sex and sexuality, especially in the divergent religious responses. Today, it is no longer a simple task to predict with any accuracy the consequences of these experimental ventures.

Finally, I want to thank Professor King most warmly for her commitment, concern, and support of women scholars in the Study of Religions. She has travelled a path that has inspired many of us to continue, engaging with the issues and problems that she has raised, in our own efforts to deepen and widen our explorations.

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