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GENDER BASED ANXIETY IN RELIGION

EUROPEAN CULTURAL IDENTITY FORMATION

- consider inequality-generating categories of gender, class, race, sexuality, age, (dis)ability, religion and nationality.
- “gender identity” & “religious identity” are often ignored
- the deconstruction or questioning of “gender” and “religion” can provoke great fears
- “construction of the other” or “Othering”

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- What is disturbing is the dynamics created when ‘women’ and ‘religion’ are claimed to be identity markers in a way that fuel fundamentalist, non-democratic, non-feminist movements, and ‘women’ and ‘religion’ are expelled from scholarly analysis and reflection and the public sphere. (2017, 165).

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RELIGION, WOMEN, POWER STRUCTURES, AND STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL VIOLENCE

- “Are Religions a Place of Emancipation for Women? Progress and Setbacks”, CoE side event organized by Gender Equality Expert Dr. Anne Nègre, 21 June 2016



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ESSENTIALIST VIEW OF BINARY GENDER VS. A NON-BINARY DEFINITION OF GENDER IN ALL RELIGIONS

- **Essentialist view:** man and woman are inherently and irreducibly different & cannot take the same roles as men, e.g. religious leadership positions.
- **Non-binary definition of gender:** not a question of which religion, but a question of with whom the prerogative of the final interpretation remains.
- **Gender** is not only socially but **also theologically** constructed.

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NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AND THE FEMININE CAN BE FOUND IN ALL RELIGIONS

- Latvian Lutheran Church: ban of women's access to the same offices as men (June 2016).
- Catholic & Orthodox Church: women cannot lead a parish and cannot become priests.
- Ultra-orthodox Judaism: women cannot become rabbis.
- Buddhism: in two mainstream traditions women cannot become fully ordained (comparable to priest)

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GENDER SEGREGATION

- Israel: although forbidden by law since 2011, women still sit at the back of the bus or don't get transport
- In many religious spaces women sit either on a different side, in the back behind men, or not visible on the gallery or in an extra room.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THEOLOGIANS IN PRIVATE & PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

- in Europe, since 1998, Catholic theologians (men & women) only receive a chair if they position themselves against women's ordination.
- In Germany, in 2017, women still hold significantly fewer chairs than men: Evangelic Lutheran Theology 106 out of a total of 421 chairs (25%), Roman Catholic Theology 73 out of a total of 353 chairs (21%).

REASONS FOR NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN IN RELIGIONS

- maintaining power
- ascetic misogyny
 - women are often seen as threat
 - when they demand equality, they are considered splittists
 - they are seen as agents or precursors of distraction and ruin
 - or portrayed as weaker human beings who need male protection which keeps them away from equal positions

IMPACT OF NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN IN RELIGIONS

In many religions women have no equal access to

- (a) sacred knowledge,
- (b) participation in practices and rituals maintaining the future of their religious tradition (through forum participation, decision-making, problem-solving etc.),
- (c) the existence of self-dependent monastic institutions.

They are excluded from the core of the religion itself.

POSSIBILITIES TO ACT AGAINST DISCRIMINATION OF WOMEN IN THE FIELD OF RELIGION (POLITICAL SIDE)

- Political side, the state should promote the actual implementation of equal rights and take steps to eliminate disadvantages that now exist, based on:
 - United Nations Covenant (UNO-Pakt II), 1966, Article 3
 - European Convention of Human Rights, 1950, Article 14

POSSIBILITIES TO ACT AGAINST DISCRIMINATION OF WOMEN IN THE FIELD OF RELIGION (RELIGIOUS SIDE)

- Change cannot only come from the secular, legal side, but also has to come from the religious side:
 - For change or transformation, textual evidence must come from the direct and original source: the authoritative religious texts themselves.
 - It is the cultural approach that needs to be transformed, not the canonical texts. But their interpretation has to become contextual and dialogical.