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Article

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Abstract

Drawing on the scholarship of Critical Religion, this article shows how the modern category "religion" operates through a gender code which upholds its discursive power and enables the production of religious—and therefore racial—hierarchies. Specifically, it argues that mentioning religion automatically makes gender present in discourse. Acknowledging religion as an inherently gendered category in this way gives further insight into the discursive power and functioning of the religious label. With the example of the Westphalian production of the "myth of religious violence" and the employment of "religion" in colonial contexts, I demonstrate how a gender code upholds and enables the discursive power of religion. Religion is both gendered (as part of the Western public/private binary) and gendering (in colonial contexts vis-à-vis non-Christian, non-White religions). Acknowledging the multiple ways in which religion is gendered and gendering, then, has important bearings on the analysis of religion's racializing function which is upheld and aided by the gender code through which religion is spoken.

Keywords

Gender, race, Critical Religion, discursive power, gender code

Within critical scholarship on religion, "religion" has long been acknowledged as the "historical product of discursive processes" (Asad 1993, 29) rather than a pre-existing and established object. Instead of a self-evident concept whose contents can be identified or defined, religion needs to be acknowledged as a social construct which "invents that

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which it claims to describe" (Lynch 2017, 285). In this light, scholars from the recently founded tradition of Critical Religion have highlighted the discursive power of the concept religion, as well as its racialized foundation and racializing function in the modern, colonial context (Fitzgerald 2015; King 2017, xiiv; Robinson 2019).[1] As Fitzgerald (2016, 308) notes, the focus in studying religion should be in "understanding how the category [religion] works and what it does [as well as] how and in what circumstances it emerged." This critical, "genealogical turn" in religious studies (Vial 2016, 189) has further produced and reinstated the analysis of religion as an inherently racialized category. What has not been addressed sufficiently within the newly founded tradition of "Critical Religion" and constitutes the contribution of this article, is how and in what ways religion is also inherently gendered, both historically and discursively.

As Vial (2016) but also Delatolla and Yao (2018) note, race and religion need to be analyzed together as both categories were used for the same (colonial) purpose and are inextricably tied to modernity.[2] I argue that speaking religion is always also a gendered process since it operates and functions through a gender code and discourse. Recognizing this gender code, then, provides a deeper, more nuanced understanding of religion's discursive power and how it operates as a power category in modernity. Whilst gender operates as a third category alongside race and religion that has (constitutively) defined modernity just like race and religion, I argue that it also constitutes the code through which religion (alongside race) is spoken. This, then, means that religion is always already a gendered concept even when gender is not explicitly under discussion.[3] This is the summary of my argument in this article.

There does not seem to be much recognition of what I call a gender code inscribed into the modern category of religion.[4] While much research has been conducted within the broad field of gender and religion, most of it has concentrated on women and/in religion (see for example Ahmed 1992) or feminist theology and re-interpretations of religious scriptures (see Hampson 1990; Schüssler Fiorenza 2013). I argue that a gender identity is inscribed into the concept of religion which makes gender automatically present in any discourse on, about or involving religion. This gender code, as I argue in this article, substantiates and further explains the discursive power of religion, further shedding light on how religion's feminizing and racializing function was used as a colonial tool and continues to be used today.

Thus, in this article I explore two key arguments to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the discursive power of religion. Building on Critical Religion's main tenet, I argue for religion to be understood as a power category (Fitzgerald 2015, 304): saying religion has consequences and, "allows one *to do things*" (Lynch 2017, 286, italics in original). This produces the first key argument of this article: I argue that this discursive power of religion is also grounded in its gender code, rendering religion a hierarchical construct which I conceptualize as part of a logocentric binary.[5] Religion as a gendered hierarchical construct then further demonstrates its discursive power as it allows the gendering of other peoples and practices, labeled as religious or non-religious. This is the second key argument of this article. The gendered construction of religion allows for its discursive power, which in turn allows the gendering of other practices, concepts or peoples, labeled as religious. Religion, then, is both gendered and gendering at the same time.

I begin with a brief overview of feminists' limited attention to religion's discursive dimension and Critical Religion's limited attention to the gendered aspect of religion's discursive power. Next, I introduce the gender code: I argue that the logocentric binaries, as theorized by Derrida, structuring Western thought and language more generally, also constitute a

gender code.[6] This gender code has also produced the co-dependent logocentrism of religion-secularism in modernity. I illustrate how this renders religion a gendered category with the example of the good religion/bad religion narrative, stemming from the Westphalian invention of the "myth of religious violence" (Cavanaugh 2009). This narrative demonstrates how religion operates in line with Judith Butler's (1999) theory on gender performance. Both examples demonstrate how religion, in modernity, is gendered feminine as private, emotional, and irrational. In what follows, I demonstrate the second part of my argument by illustrating how the gendered construction of religion unleashes its discursive power, especially in non-Western contexts. Drawing on religion's employment in colonial and imperial contexts, it becomes clear how religion is not just part of a logocentric, hierarchical binary (religion versus the secular), but also a hierarchical concept in itself, which serves to assert a Christian-centric norm (linked to whiteness) whilst gendering non-Christian, non-White religions as more or less feminized (hence devalorized) depending on their proximity to the (white) Euro-Christian model. In this context the discursive power of religion becomes clear; speaking religion has fulfilled different purposes at different times, all, however, with gendered implications.[7] While religion has been denied to some people or practices it has been purposefully assigned to others, in both cases for colonial purposes of delegitimizing the people or practices in question. In the final section, I outline contemporary, gendered implications of "speaking religion" before concluding this article.

Feminism, religion, and Critical Religion

Feminism's relationship with religion has, historically, been a difficult one. As Brown (2015, 301) notes, many feminist scholars view all religion as inherently patriarchal and therefore as something which needs to be fought against. Thus, gender studies has generally viewed religion as harboring a "deep antifemale bias" due to its "ancient origin" (Parekh as cited in Cavanaugh 2009, 42) and as "responsible for injustices against women" (Goldenberg 2014, 255). Religions have been identified as "vestigial states that function to support male hegemony" (248). The so-called resurgence of religion within global affairs is consequently seen as a signifier for worse gender inequality and resurging injustices (Razavi and Jenichen 2010, 834). As Brown (2015, 299) further notes, the "War on Terror" constitutes a contemporary example for the dominant link drawn between gender and religion; it has been portrayed and perceived as a war, driven by religious fanatics who do not respect women and are misogynist, as opposed to the secular West, which upholds gender equality. This example also points to the connection of religion and race: the non-West is more prone to religious fanaticism which is tied to gender inequality. Accounts depicting gender injustices and inequalities caused or justified by religion within domestic and international settings therefore often dominate the study of gender and religion.

Consequently, and as Critical Religion scholars Goldenberg (2017, 535) and Fitzgerald (2011, 70) point out, another focus among feminists who study religion has been on the importance of female goddesses as a counterbalance to male-dominated or phallocentric gods, saints, and prophets. Thus, a major goal of feminists in religion has been to "purge religion of sexism in order to enhance it" and find better ways for women to be religious (Goldenberg 2017, 536). However, at the same time, feminist religion scholars have largely left the concept of religion itself unanalyzed and support it as a natural and universal category. Thus, what feminist theory seems to have neglected is how gender features into

the discourse *about* religion (i.e. the historic and discursive construction of religion) independent of the (assumed) *content* of religion or the discourses within.

There are at least two notable exceptions among feminist religion scholars who point to the historical feminization of religion without solely focusing on an assumed content of it. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2013, 45) writes in the introductory issue of this journal that

> critical feminist scholarship [has] shown that, in modernity, religion has been feminized. Religion has been conceptualized as belonging to the private feminine, emotional, aesthetic sphere over and against which the public rational, culturally authoritative masculine sphere of progress, rationality, subjectivity and modernity has been defined.

Joan Scott (2009) similarly points to the "feminization of religion" as evidenced by its relegation to the private sphere and its opposition to rationality. However, while acknowledging the category as feminized historically, neither Schüssler Fiorenza nor Scott focus on this element of the construction of religion as essential to understanding the *function* of religion discursively as I argue in this article. Instead, the focus of Schüssler Fiorenza's work is on wo/men's position in religion and theology and the intersectional oppressions they face within it, whilst Scott's focus is on increased gender inequality in the wake of secularization, especially in France. Thus, apart from these exceptions within critical feminist religion/theology, most feminist religion scholars reproduce an essentialist understanding of religion as a self-evident, transhistorical and transcultural concept which has played a vital role in women's oppression even when it has also often been used by women for emancipatory purposes.

In analyzing religion from a Critical Religion perspective, I see religion as a feminized concept not just historically but also discursively. Critical Religion acknowledges religion's rather recent, and modern, construction in its post-Westphalian and Enlightenment context and aims to study how religion has been employed discursively and for what purposes. This means concentrating on the discursive effects of religion first and foremost rather than assuming that the category religion has objective and fixed content which sought to be specified by scholars of religion (Arnal 2000, 30; Fitzgerald 2015). As Arnal and McCutcheon note, what should be studied is not what religion is or what it is not, but rather the process, the "making of it" (Arnal and McCutcheon 2013, 132). I argue that one crucial element, overlooked in this making-of process, is the gender code inscribed in it. Whilst Critical Religion has provided a critical historical deconstruction of the category religion and drawn attention to its colonial, often racialized employment (Fitzgerald 2016, 308; King 1999), its gender code is rarely acknowledged but adds an additional and essential analytical layer to fully understanding and appreciating its discursive power.

The gender code in western thought: Religious/secular public/private masculine/feminine

What I introduce as the gender code is derived from Derrida's concept of logocentrism. Logocentrism is a term coined by Derrida to describe the "firstness" of the word (logos) in Western metaphysics (Sarup 1993, 36). More specifically, for Derrida, logocentrism is constituted by the binary oppositions which are central to Western discourse and structure Western thought more generally (Edkins 1999, 66). According to Derrida these binaries

further serve to impose "violent hierarchies": rather than being mere opposites, these binaries are hierarchical where one element of the binary is always privileged above the other (65). Thus, oppositions such as body/soul, appearance/essence, culture/nature and interior/exterior constitute examples of the binaries ordering our thinking (Sarup 1993, 38). However, Derrida argues that, within the binaries organizing Western thought (and therefore also discourse), "the first term is always marked by traces of the second." The second term then constitutes the deferred element, which whilst essential in constituting and defining the first one also constitutes everything that the first is not (Edkins 1999, 12). The "privileged" term therefore "depends for its identity on its excluding the other" (Sarup 1993, 50).

I argue that these logocentric binaries also constitute the gender code which structures Western thought and discourse. The examples given above, such as culture/nature and soul/body, are attached to the gendered masculinity/femininity binary which always privileges the first trait, gendered masculine, over and above the feminine trait (see also Gentry 2016, 148). Within gendered binaries the masculine term is always marked by traces of the feminine yet also constitutes everything that the feminine is not. The overvaluing of masculinity, as Peterson and Runyan (2010, 13) note, is dependent on the devaluing of femininity. The gender code is therefore always automatically implied in Derrida's concept of logocentrism. Derrida's own work later points to this when he introduces and adds the concept of *phallogocentrism* to describe the "complicity of Western thought with a notion of male firstness" (Derrida quoted in Derrida and McDonald 1997, 29).

Religion, I then argue, presents another logocentric binary. Religion, in modernity, is not a standalone concept (Fitzgerald 2017). Rather, it is embedded with a set of oppositional categories which determine its meaning and establish its discursive position within these binaries. King (2017, xiiv) refers to this as part of the discursive field which produces the meaning of religion as a particular kind of "language game." Religion depends on and draws its meaning from its binary other, that is, the secular. Whilst the secular constitutes everything that the religious is not, it is also concurrently hierarchically positioned above the religious and constitutes the element which is valued above the religious in contemporary (Western) society. The valuing of the secular and everything associated with it depends on the devaluing of religion and everything associated with it.

A closer look at the characteristics associated with the religious, such as for example being irrational, emotional, subjective/personal, and spiritual simultaneously constitute attributes usually ascribed to femininity. They also stand in stark contrast to the masculinist attributes usually associated with the secular sphere, such as being rational, measured, orderly, objective and neutral (Dawson 2013, 217). Consequently, the masculinist attributes attached to the secular are valorized when the opposite is true for religion whose associated attributes closely mirror the characteristics often attached to femininity, thereby constituting devalorized attributes in Western thought. This demonstrates how religion's discursive construction is clearly codified in gendered language.[8]

One of the most obvious signifiers of the gender code inherent to the religious/secular binary is the attached public/private binary. This is also the most apparent signifier of religion's historical feminization which is inextricably linked to the discursive one I have outlined above.[9] In *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman (1988) argues that the modern social contract, upon which Western society and civilization is said to be built, established a "masculinist" public sphere which not only involved men's freedom at the expense of women's subjugation (and relegation to the private sphere) but also involved the privileging

of masculinist attributes more generally. These attributes and concepts, such as rationality, politics, power, and science are considered to be markers of the public sphere until today—they also mark the superior term in a logocentric binary. Therefore, such terms as rationality, politics, and power automatically co-constitute that which is considered part of the devalorized, private sphere—emotion, religion, and submissiveness/weakness, respectively.

As Schüssler Fiorenza (2013) notes, the Enlightenment construction of religion paints it as "belonging to the private, feminine, emotional, aesthetic sphere over and against . . . the public rational, culturally authoritative masculine sphere of progress, rationality . . . and modernity" (45). In this context, religion's subordination to the domain of secular politics closely mirrors the relegation of women into the private sphere and their subordination to male dominance and power; Schüssler Fiorenza (2013, 45) further points out that, in modernity, religion, like the female, has been relegated to the private sphere and made an "affair of the heart"; that is, something concerned with the emotional, not the rational sphere of life. Religion, as I have argued, is also feminized discursively and has become "sticky" with (devalorized) feminized attributes, this then enables discursively what can be seen historically.[10] Brown (2015, 304), for example, notes how "[t]he language used to deny women suffrage is similar to the justifications given for the exclusion of religion from the public sphere." Religion in modernity, then, is always already a gendered category since its modern invention has come together with and was dependent on its relegation to the private sphere.

"Good" vs "Bad religion": Religion as the "angel of the house" or the "irrational maniac"

What I have shown above is that modern religion is feminized as part of a logocentric binary. This feminization of religion manifests itself in different ways. One case that illustrates the feminization of religion is the dominant "good religion" versus "bad religion" narrative, very prominent in the discipline of International Relations but also in general discourse. This narrative is also deeply rooted in and originates from religion's Westphalian invention as inherently prone to violence. This Westphalian narrative of Europe's past religious wars has informed and upheld the popular and conventional wisdom that the Peace of Westphalia, by separating church from state power, ended an era of chaos and bloodshed caused by religion (Cavanaugh 2009). This belief is foundational to the disciplines of International Relations and Politics (Fox and Sandler 2004, 15) and widely accepted as common knowledge and truth. It constitutes what Cavanaugh (2009) refers to as the "myth of religious violence," that is, the unsubstantiated Westphalian assumption that religion, if not kept private, always constitutes a risk of causing violence, chaos and war.

According to Cavanaugh (2009, 4), the "attempt to create a transhistorical and transcultural concept of religion that is essentially prone to violence is one of the foundational legitimating myths of the liberal nation-state." The idea that religion causes violence is therefore not a neutral and empirical observation but instead functions ideologically to legitimate the modern, Westphalian nation-state (59) by setting into place the binary between "good" religion (which is private) and "bad" religion (which inserts itself into politics and has the tendency to cause violence and chaos).

Against the background of religion as inherently war-prone, religion has been relegated to the private sphere, determined as irrelevant and marginal (since it is not political) but at the same time threatening and irrational if it enters the political sphere (Fitzgerald 2011).

Markers of the private sphere, such as the domestic, weak, emotional and the spiritual, while usually framed as in need of protection, paradoxically are also dangerous, subversive and threatening (Brown 2015, 304). Pateman (1980), in "The Disorder of Women" notes how women are usually perceived as emotional, nurturing (peaceful), non-political and passive. However, if they are not constantly kept in check, they are also assumed to be dangerous and threatening to their binary opposite—men, who represent the rational, orderliness, and civility. While good women are sacrificing, submissive, and obedient angels of the house, they also have a natural tendency to pose a danger to society due to their natural deficiency and inherent irrationality. Classical theorists described women as defective in their natures and therefore as a threat to men's superior characteristics, such as rationality and morality (Pateman 1980). Women's emotion and irrationality were considered a threat and a "constant downward pull on Man" (Third 2010, 86). According to these early theorists, women constituted a constant and natural source of disorder to the state as they carried within themselves a natural hostility to (masculine) civilization and advancement (Pateman 1980, 20).

This good/bad women narrative mirrors Fitzgerald's (2011, 18) description of the two faces of the modern construction of religion. Whilst the first face is the peaceful and true religion, that is, religion as "peace-loving, non-violent, [and] non-political," religion as it ought to be and solely "concerned with . . . inner spiritual life," the second face is "essentially barbarous, violent . . . irrational [and depicted as] a malign agent in the world," that is "causing conflict and mayhem and threatening the essentially peace-loving and reasonable nature of the non-religious secular state" (18). In the same way that women have been depicted, religion also is described and conceptualized as naturally either the "angel of the house," concerned only with private inner spirituality or salvation, or as the "irrational maniac threatening to destroy the rational secular order" in public (79).

Seventeenth century influential Enlightenment thinkers, such as Locke and Penn, argued that violent and irrational religion was not "true" religion "but a barbarous imposter responsible for despotism and bloody warfare, a *perversion* of true religion" (italics added). Religion in its true nature, they argued, is (and therefore ought to be) "essentially private, personal, non-political, tolerant, concerned with the saving of the soul and with the life after death" (Fitzgerald 2011, 79). According to this narrative, religion, by its *true* nature has nothing to do with power; it is "kind, gentle, non-political and non-profit making" (180). It is further a matter of "personal faith and piety, essentially separated from the non-religious rough-and-tumble of practical politics and economics" (180), that is, an "affair of the heart" (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013, 45).[11]

Gender as performative: "true religion" vs "bad religion"

However, religion does not always act according to its true, feminine nature. Instead, it often can be seen as gender non-conforming: violent, political, and loud. Drawing on Judith Butler's (1999) well-known theory on gender performativity, feminist scholars have established how men and women's gender non-conforming behavior or actions get punished by society and is portrayed as unnatural and wrong. Women, especially, acting against their supposedly peaceful, nurturing and passive natures, by acting violently (or simply politically) have regularly been depicted and presented in dominant (societal) discourse as more dangerous and irrational than their male counterparts (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015, 94; Third 2014, 39). Female terrorists are a case in point: These women are "doubly deviant" (Lloyd

1995; Third 2014, 39) since their violence is not just illegal or wrong, as that of a male terrorist would be, but also inherently *unnatural*, as they act against their true female/feminine natures.

Whilst religion is seen as true religion when acting according to its (gendered) modern conception as peaceful, spiritual, and private (much as women ought to act), it is viewed as defective and unnatural when acting against its gendered conception and as political, public, and violent instead. Similarly, religion acting against its true nature (as violent or political) is seen as dangerous, irrational, and fanatic in contrast to the secular state whose violence is conceived as necessary, rational, and measured (Cavanaugh 2009; Fitzgerald 2011, 5). Thus, what a gender analysis reveals here is how the feminization of religion has served to justify and legitimize the nation state as well as its violent foundation and practices. It further continues to uphold the state-centered focus and narrative in the discipline of International Relations and Politics. It further illuminates the tendency of labeling religious actors seen to act politically or inserting religion into political causes, as irrational fanatics, radicals, or extremists. Terrorist organizations or actors, labeled or perceived as religious, are often referred to as not being true Muslims, or true Christians. What is then noteworthy is that these actors, so quickly labeled as religious are usually non-Western actors, which implies that non-Western people are more prone to bad religion than those in the West.

The discursive power of religion can then be clearly observed in this gendered process of how political, (i.e. gender non-conforming religion) is described and presented as bad religion, or a perversion of true and good (i.e., gender-conforming) religion. Actors within global affairs who bring religion into politics are regularly labeled irrational extremists or radicals and are often denied the rationality that is implied in secular political actors. Looking at religion through a gender lens shows how religion is a clearly gendered concept; thus, using this concept by speaking it is *gendering*. Not only does religion have discursive power, it has a gendering discursive power. This means that speaking religion will have gendered implications—the example of the dominant narrative on "bad religion" versus "good religion" already illustrates this. Attaching religion to political actors is likely to feminize them as irrational, radical, or fanatic; attaching it to private actors usually feminizes them as emotional, spiritual and blissful: good religion. However, religion in modernity is also a hierarchical construct in itself, positing true and good religion as aligned with the Euro-Christian model and ideal (see also Robinson 2019, 4).[12] Thus, speaking religion in non-Western, non-Christian contexts demonstrates another dimension of its gendered implications.

Speaking religion for colonial purposes: Assigning and denying religion

According to Gani (2017), the colonial, racist (Enlightenment) roots of contemporary ideas and norms are frequently erased by divorcing the "concept" from its historical "conception"—in other words, the colonizing intent for which a concept was born and first applied continues to constitute the use of that concept today.[13] If I apply this to the concept of religion, then its discursive power becomes especially clear in the colonial context in which religion became "a stalking horse for the colonial agenda" (Arnal 2017, 425). Speaking religion upheld and justified the colonial project.

I argue that the gender code inherent to religion played a significant role in enabling this. This becomes especially clear from the practice of assigning religion, constituting another example of how religion is gendered and consequently *gendering*. Assigning religion to the

colonized delegitimized native practices and beliefs feminized entire populations as irrational, superstitious, and unfit to govern themselves, thereby aiding the racialization of them as inferior, barbarous, or uncivilized. The racialized consequences of speaking religion have been noted by Critical Religion scholars; however, it is important to note how the process of racialization is always linked to feminization. As Sara Ahmed (2004, 3) notes, the process of feminization is often co-constitutive of "becoming less white," demonstrating how the processes of racialization and feminization are inextricably entwined. I argue that this is exemplified by the discursive power of speaking religion in colonial contexts and I argue that this is enabled through religion's gender code.

In the earliest days of colonial expansion, the practice of denying religion usually prevailed. In those days, religion was at first only reluctantly applied to other cultures, as local customs often did not fit the template of religion, based on the idea of Christianity (and implicitly the good religion model). Thus, on first encounter, indigenous peoples were often denied the acknowledgment of having a religion, as their cultures were not deemed rational and civilized enough to have one (Chidester 2017, 556). As Vial (2016, 247) points out, Hegel argued that African cultures could hardly count as religions. Rather, local cultures of Africans were seen as "primitive" and were thought to die out soon (Masuzawa 2005, 42). Schleiermacher's denial of religion to Australia's Aboriginals is based on the same reasoning (Vial 2016, 221). Eiselen, an expert on African religion, who was also an apartheid theorist and administrator, reasoned that the term religion could only be used for "elevated cultures." Africans, however, lacked this form of higher culture that had been achieved by the Europeans (cited in Chidester 2017, 557). This denial of religion to Africans (as well as other "tribal" cultures) by European colonizers openly dehumanized them. Denying religion and thereby full humanity to these peoples further aided and justified the colonial project. In this case, it served the purpose of denying them the development and rationality that Europeans had arrived at centuries ago, thereby feminizing and infantilizing these peoples as occupying the lowest stage of development.

Thus, despite the devalorization and feminization of it, religion is still acknowledged as the foundation of civilization by Enlightenment thinkers as well as later sociologists or philosophers. However, importantly, the marker of advanced civilizations like Europe is also the subsequent loss of religion (in the public sphere). Max Weber (as cited in Horii 2019, 30) for example explains the superiority of the Occident as a civilization which is based on its roots in Christianity (and more specifically Protestantism). At the same time, he holds that the Occident constitutes the highest form of civilization because it arrived at a status where religion was dying out (30). Sigmund Freud (1930) in *Civilization and its Discontents* shares this understanding of religion today as a remnant of less civilized and inferior races and the need for religion as a signifier of lesser intelligence and infantilism. Thus, the later discovery by colonial administrators that Africans, for example, had a religious system (Chidester 2017, 556) served the purpose of demonstrating how European society had developed in accordance with rational principles: "In contrast, every region of the nonmodern non-West was presumed to be thoroughly in the grip of religion," with all aspects of life ruled by archaic metaphysics of the magical or supernatural (Masuzawa 2005, 16). Non-European cultures had not learned to free themselves from the irrational "grip of religion," their "religions" (if they had any) had not progressed and developed into the privatized, good religion model yet, signaling their inferiority vis-à-vis the European colonizers.

Kant, for example, makes it very clear that good religion or as he calls it "true religion," is universal, rational, and moral and that this form of religion has an "essential kinship with

Christianity" (Armour 2017, 483). Given that modern religion is based on the Christian, more specifically Protestant, model, religion consequently finds "its clearest, most developed manifestations in European avatars" (Arnal 2017, 425). As a result, all other religions outside Europe constitute at best "rough drafts, archaic or primitive forms of religion" (Dubuisson 2003, 114). Assigning it to colonized peoples' practices of beliefs therefore naturally racializes and feminizes them as less developed and less civilized.

However, as Chidester (2017, 556) notes, the initial denial of religion was later followed by the "discovery" that Africans and other colonial subjects in the world had religions after all. Interestingly, he also notes that his discovery served a particular purpose as it became an efficient way of keeping these peoples in place. Thus, once subjugated under colonial rule, attributing religion to indigenous people became a way of *depoliticizing* and thereby marginalizing their cultures (Fitzgerald 2016, 308; Cavanaugh 2009, 86). This process of depoliticizing, I would emphasize, was achieved by utilizing the feminized construction of (ideal) religion as private, apolitical, and emotional rather than rational and political. Attributing religion to various local practices or customs then served the gendered purpose of denying it space in the public realm. As Orsi (2005, 178) points out, during the age of European colonialism discourse about religion became "key to controlling and dominating" the colonized subjects. I argue that constitutive of this function of religion was its gender identity. This gender identity, coded feminine, made it possible to assign religion to indigenous peoples as a way of demarcating people within gendered and racialized hierarchies.

An example of this is India where Hinduism was invented as a religion by colonial administrators (Masuzawa 2005, 282; King 1999). Hinduism can originally and best be described as the dominant culture which colonizers discovered in India and which constituted an important part of Indian identity or of being Indian (Cavanaugh 2009, 91; King 1999, 99). Colonizers were therefore reluctant to apply the label of religion to Hinduism at first as it did not neatly fit into the narrow and Christian-centric template of what was considered religion (that is, "true religion"). However, classifying Hinduism as a religion, enabled the colonizers to marginalize and privatize what it meant to be Indian and, instead, impose and make public the rational and British-colonial order (Cavanaugh 2009, 91; King 1999, 96). Speaking religion, then, served the colonial purpose of constructing Indians in opposition and in stark contrast to British colonial masculinity as being naturally effeminate, emotional, and superstitious (King 1999, 113).

The gendered construction of religious hierarchies

What becomes clear from the employment of religion in colonial contexts is how the developing of racial hierarchies was based on and often made possible through religious classifications. These race hierarchies, upheld through assigning and denying religion, are also tied to a gender hierarchy, infantilizing and feminizing people based on a religious classification, signaling their civilizational status. Enlightenment thinkers, such as Hegel, whilst asserting that African cultures barely counted as religions (Vial 2016, 247), further put Asian religions at a very early stage of development. Monotheistic religions, based on perceived proximity to the Christian template, indicated the highest stage of development, followed by religions which constitute the lowest form, that is, idol worshipping (245). Aboriginals, similarly to Africans, were seen to constitute the "lowest step of human development" due to the fact that they allegedly did not display "any trace of laws or civil constitution, of religion or superstition or agriculture or arts (. . .)." (Schleiermacher as cited in Vial 2016,

206). I argue that utilizing the gendered foundation, inherent to the category religion, played an important part in enabling the sorting and ordering of non-white people on what Vial (53) calls a "developmental trajectory." This trajectory translates into a racial hierarchy which feminizes non-white races as more or less irrational depending on their proximity to European civilization and race.

Feminist theory has acknowledged the infantilization and feminization of native peoples as a colonial tool of subjugation (Peterson 2007, 16). However, feminist postcolonial scholars have largely theorized this as stemming from the classical and modern patriarchal systems that have governed European society and were extended to colonies as constituting the "children" of the colonizing father states (Patil 2013, 848). However, what needs to be acknowledged within feminist postcolonial scholarship is how the infantilization and feminization of natives has also been constructed through the gendered practice of assigning or denying religion. Speaking religion was *constitutive* of the infantilization and feminization of the colonial subjects, practices, and beliefs. This, then, signals that this gendered construction and use of religion cannot be divorced from its current and contemporary use and employment; that is, its conception cannot be divorced from religion as a concept today. Consequentially, then, the gendered (and racial) implications of speaking religion will be observable in contemporary contexts just as well.

Contemporary contexts: Implications of "speaking religion"

A more recent consequence of the colonial and gendered employment of religion, then, can be seen with the example of Japan. Many non-Western cultures actively sought to be recognized as having religion in order to be accepted as civilized and rational. However, what is sought is not just the recognition of religion per se but rather a recognition of good religion—something that has been privatized and made distinct from practices that are political instead. Thus, being recognized for having religion implies having adopted a gender binary (religious/secular) which has not been in place before.[14] Isomae (2017, 87) provides the example of Japan, which in the process of opening up to the West in 1858, was forced to adopt a very specific Western model of religion in order to be accepted as a civilized country. Thus, although in Japan's case no direct colonization took place, it had to import and internalize the Protestant model of religion and apply it to the rituals and practices which would come closest to passing as religious. This also led to some local rituals deliberately being framed under public morality rather than religion in order to avoid their privatization. Shrines, for example, were said to function for the reverence of forefathers and ancestors rather than supernatural gods (88). Thus, to avoid the feminized depoliticization of local customs, similar to the case of India, Japan demonstrates a case of the strategic use of "speaking religion," taking control of its gendered implications in Japan's best interest.

Masuzawa (2005) further argues that the main function of the colonial practice of acknowledging world religions is to distinguish between the West and the rest rather than objectively listing the different religions of the world. It serves to affirm the privileged position of Christianity while at the same time denying this position to other religions. As she points out, earlier scholars of religion distinguished all other religions from Christianity by asserting that Christianity was the only (truly) universal religion while all other religions were better understood as national/ethnic religions (116). Typical classificatory systems of religions sorted religions from least developed to most developed, starting with "prehistoric" religions and followed by "primitive" religions, ancient national religions and ultimately

"world" religions (295). This implies that while Christianity served as the good-religion model (gender-conforming religion), every other religion was assigned different degrees of bad- (gender non-conforming) religion. Islam, as Masuzawa further notes, was seen as an ethnic religion for Arabs and for a very long time did not count as a world religion such as Christianity and hence did not enjoy the privileged status of a monotheistic religion, whereas Buddhism and Hinduism were both included on a standard list of world religions much earlier than Islam (179). Islam further has a long history of being presented as the prime example of bad religion (Cavanaugh 2009, 4).[15] The consequently accompanying racialization of Islam has been noted by Delatolla and Yao (2018, 12) as having contributed to the imposition of racial hierarchies in French administered Syria which persist until today.

Under the French administration in Syria, demarcating and classifying the population based on race (i.e. based on differences in physical features) was not possible, given their multi-ethnic composition. The French, then, distinguished on religion instead, marking the Christian Syrian population as "an extension of European civilization" and their Muslim counterparts as occupying a lower civilizational status (Delatolla and Yao 2018, 11). Muslims were constructed as savage, barbarous, and fanatic given their "lack of rationality, an attribute that was linked to belief in a Christian God" (12). This gendered and racialized religious hierarchy remains in place today and the construction of Muslims as inherently fanatical and barbaric is "evidenced through the public discourse of the war on terror . . . Trump's Muslim ban, and the Syrian refugee crisis" (14). The latter has elicited a disproportionate focus on Christian refugees from Syria, evinced, for example, by "the Belgian government's insistence that only Christian refugees from Syria be provided safety in Belgium" (14).

Religion, then, constitutes a gendered hierarchical construct which privileges a gender-conforming ideal type of religion, based on the Euro-Christian model. Other religions are then measured against this model as more or less conforming to it. This means that there cannot be equality of religion "because the category itself emerged and continues to function for the purposes of maintaining hierarchies" (Lynch 2017, 291). Thus, the category religion implies a subordinate position of any other religion outside of Christianity. It is therefore not surprising that, as Asad (2003, 183) argues, some religions are more welcome than others in the West's modern and liberal public sphere (see also Vial 2016, 192). Those that are welcome are the ones which "are willing and able to enter the public sphere for the purpose of rational debate" (Asad 2003, 183). The implications are that these religions first need to acquire the rationality and gendered characteristics of the good religion model, already implicated in Christianity.

Concluding remarks

In this article, I have demonstrated how religion in modernity, is always already a gendered—and therefore also racialized—category regardless of how and when it is used or employed, and regardless of whether or not gender is explicitly under discussion. Religion is a gendered category, historically as a result of its Westphalian and Enlightenment construction as private and distinct from the masculinist sphere of politics. It is also gendered discursively through the logocentric binaries it is embedded in which I have identified as the gender code through which it is spoken. Recognizing the gender code inscribed into the modern category of religion adds an essential layer to fully appreciating its discursive power, largely neglected in feminist scholarship on religion and further contributing to Critical

Religion's mission of advancing the critical understanding of how religion operates as a power category.

Religion is both gendered and gendering: It constitutes a gendered construct, constitutive of Western modernity, while also performing the function of gendering that which is associated with it or labeled as religious. This, too, is a function that furthers the project of Western (colonial-) modernity and has become clear with the strategic employment of religion as a colonial, racializing tool of subjugation. Speaking religion can be a powerful tool for marginalizing, privatizing and delegitimizing actors or practices through the gender apparatus. As with gendered constructs more generally, it is also a hierarchical construct which privileges a gender-conforming, ideal type of religion, based on the Christian model, tied to European, white civilization. Against this ideal type stand other world religions as gender non-conforming "bad religions," if they are deemed too far removed from the Christian model.

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Notes

1. Important scholars which have paved the way for Critical Religion are, among others, Asad (1993), Dubuisson (2003), McCutcheon (1997), and Flood (1999).
2. When I refer to "modernity" in this article, I assume this concept to be inextricable from "coloniality" as modernity's co-constitutive "darker side" (Quijano 2000 and Mignolo 2011; see also Robinson 2019 in a recent issue of this journal).
3. I am borrowing this expression from Vial's (2016) similar (though not analogous) argument on the connection between race and religion.
4. A notable exception is Schüssler Fiorenza (2013) as well as Joan Scott (2009) as I show in the next section.
5. This is based on Derrida's concept of logocentrism, introduced later in this article.
6. Of course "Western" is a very broad term. In this article I use it to refer to both the location and the concept of "modernity" as a post-Enlightenment, Christian/post-Christian ideology. Please see footnote 2 for further elaboration on "modernity."
7. When I refer to "speaking religion" I mean the employment of "religion" in discourse.
8. I adopt Spike Peterson's (2007, 13) approach to gender as an analytical category to make sense of religion's discursive power through a gender lens. Peterson refers to gender as a "signifying system of masculine-feminine differentiations that constitutes a governing code." The masculine–feminine gender binary then "codes masculine qualities as oppositional to and more highly valued than feminine qualities."
9. When I talk about privatization of religion as a product of modernity, I mean the relegation of religion in a substantive, meaningful sense. Of course, we still see religion continuing to play an important symbolic role in giving institutions cultural and historical legitimacy. For example,

cathedrals and royalty are still very much a part of the construction of the nation in England despite the broader political privatisation. But I would still argue, given the secondary influence of such institutions, that the general point regarding the feminization of religion in the public sphere is still valid. My thanks to the editors for inviting reflection on this point.

10. I am borrowing the expression of stickiness from Sara Ahmed (2004, 90) who explains how emotions and words stick to bodies through repeated history of contact between them.
11. This true religion as I show later, has racial implications and is tied to Christianity, positing non-Christian, non-Western religions in opposition to the true and good religion model.
12. It is not just Christianity per se but the Christian-Protestant model which became the template for the most rational "good" religion (Fitzgerald 2011, 2; 2017, 446).
13. Jasmine K Gani debates "concept versus conception" in relation to Kantian theory, where she argues that the racist conception of Kantian theory of hospitality cannot be divorced from the EU's inhospitality (as seen with the refugee crisis). The latter therefore constitutes a logical continuation of the Kantian cosmopolitan theory of hospitality on which the EU is supposedly built.
14. Adopting gendered binaries which were not in place before is another general result of colonialism and Western imperialism in many societies, not just limited to the example of gendered religion. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí (1997, 31) for example argues how "gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization by the West"; the categories men and women were not binarily opposed or hierarchical as dictated by Western thought, language, and practice.
15. Interestingly, one of the signifiers of Islam as the prime example for a "bad" religion has been and continues to be Islam's alleged gender inequality and oppression of women. For more on this see Yegenoglu (1998) as well as Nilsson (2018).

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