

Religion, Gender, Sexuality and Activism

Fourth expert meeting of the International Research and Network project Religion and Gender

15-16 December 2014
Ghent University, Belgium

Organisers: The network *Interdisciplinary Innovations in the Study of Religion and Gender: Postcolonial, Post-secular and Queer Perspectives* (Utrecht University, the Netherlands).

Hosted by the Centre for Intercultural Communication and Interaction (Ghent University, Belgium).

Co-organizers: RHEA Centre for Gender and Diversity (Free University of Brussels, Belgium), Centre for Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium).

Scientific committee:

1. Ghent University, Centre for Intercultural Communication and Interaction (CICI):
Prof. dr. Chia Longman, chia.longman@ugent.be, PhD candidate Nella van den Brandt, HendrikaPetronella.vandenBrandt@UGent.be, PhD candidate An Van Raemdonck, an.vanraemdonck@ugent.be
2. Utrecht University, the Netherlands: Prof. dr. Anne-Marie Korte, A.J.A.C.M.Korte@uu.nl
3. Free University of Brussels, RHEA Centre for Gender and Diversity: Dr. Gily Coene, gcoene@vub.ac.be
4. Catholic University of Leuven, Centre for Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities: Dr. Nadia Fadil, nadia.fadil@soc.kuleuven.be

Organising committee:

Chia Longman, Nella van den Brandt & An Van Raemdonck (Ghent University, Belgium),
Anne-Marie Korte (Utrecht University, the Netherlands).

Aim: This international expert meeting aims to discuss the study of religion and gender in relation to social movements and activism. For this purpose, a one and a half day intensive meeting will bring together scholars from different fields, such as religious studies, theology, sociology, anthropology and gender and women's studies. The topics of the keynote lectures, the roundtable discussion and the workshops will address the study of religion and gender from multiple critical postcolonial, postsecular and queer perspectives. The thematic focus is social movements and activism in contemporary multicultural societies, related to contemporary debates on multiculturalism, human rights, and social inequalities and exclusions. The meeting will discuss the complex dynamics of religion and gender in our contemporary world with regard to the perspectives of activists and at the level of autonomous movements, civil society and critique within the institutions. Activism is broadly conceived as the critique of forms of inequality experienced or articulated by autonomous groups as well as by civil society actors and social movements and actors within the institutions in order to work towards progressive change.

It further aims at:

- Bringing together scholars from different academic disciplines who are contributing to this area of research;
- Bringing together senior and junior scholars studying religion, gender and activism for discussion and exchange;
- Bringing together different critical approaches to studying religion, gender and activism in contemporary multicultural societies in order to show their significance for the study of religion and gender;
- To encourage new connections and insights on theory and methodology that will inform and stimulate the participants' own research;
- To generate new joint research applications, especially transnational and interdisciplinary research.

Application and participation:

All participants are requested to write a very short paper (max 2 pages) in preparation of this meeting to be submitted at latest on **15 November 2014**. This paper should address one of the four themes mentioned below. The questions raised below serve as an example and you are free to add other points to the conversation related to your own interests and research. The proposed topics will enable a more focused discussion in the second part of the meeting, in the afternoon of 16 December. So when choosing to address theme 1, you will be asked to participate with the roundtable that discusses theme 1.

If you are interested to participate, please confirm before **15 November 2014** by sending an e-mail to an.vanraemdonck@ugent.be. Please also indicate in this mail your preferred theme and your second choice regarding the roundtable discussions. We will aim to create balanced groups for all four topics. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Four themes of the roundtable discussions:

- 1 Dynamics between (new) forms of activism and (new) religious/secular profiling in multicultural societies

For example: What types of activism emerge in the face of changing religious and secular landscapes in various locations, as well as new forms of religious and secularist profiling, confrontation and (identity) politics in public debates? How do activists' concerns, argumentation, and styles and forms of activism respond to new challenges in contemporary multicultural societies?

- 2 Religion, gender and activism in a context of globalization: postcolonial critique and international solidarity

For example: How do issues of gender and sexuality shape global religious and secular politics? What causes the growth of homo-nationalism, how is it related to constructions of religion and secularism, and how does it affect activism? What is the meaning of international

solidarity? What are the conditions of possibility to reach and practice international solidarity through activism? Do religious-secular differences between movements and activists play a role in building international solidarity?

3 Emergence of new religious/secular and sexual/"sexularist" normativities and subjectivities

For example: Do activisms in various locations produce different kinds of religious, secular, racial, ethnic and sexual normativities? What kind of religious and gendered subjectivities do various kinds of activisms contest, produce or enable?

4 Doing feminist research on religion, gender & activism: methodological/ethical challenges

For example: How do we produce, criticise, correct, rearrange and/or renew knowledge about religion and gender when starting from activist engagements and studying social movements? What ethical issues and questions may emerge from researching religion, gender and activism?

Anne-Marie Korte, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

Chia Longman, Ghent University, Belgium

Drs. Nella vanden Brandt, Ghent University, Belgium

Drs. An Van Raemdonck, Ghent University, Belgium

Final Programme

Location of all events: KANTL (Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde), Koningstraat 18, 9000 Gent.

Day 1 – Monday 15 December 2014

14:00 – 16:00 Defence doctoral thesis *Religion, Secularity and Feminism in a West-European Context: A Qualitative Study of Organisations and Activism in Flanders*, by PhD candidate Nella van den Brandt, supervisor professor Chia Longman, Ghent University. Chaired by professor Gita Deneckere, Ghent University.

Jury members: Kristin Aune (Coventry University, UK), Sarah Bracke (Free University Brussels/Harvard University USA), Gily Coene (Free University Brussels), Janet Jakobsen (Barnard College/Columbia University USA), Anne-Marie Korte (Utrecht University, the Netherlands).

Interested participants of the expert meeting are invited to join.

16:00 – 17:00 Reception after defence

17:30 – 17:45 Welcome and opening expert meeting by the organisers – Professor Anne-Marie Korte, Utrecht University, the Netherlands & professor Chia Longman, Ghent University, Belgium

17:45– 19:00 Opening panel *Religion, Gender, Sexuality and Activism: New Issues and Methodological Challenges* – the floor to senior and junior scholars tba. Moderated by professor Ulrike Auga, Humboldt Universität, Berlin, Germany

Day 2 – Tuesday 16 December 2014

09:00 – 09:15 Welcome and introduction to the day program by professor Chia Longman, Ghent University, Belgium & professor Anne-Marie, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

09:15 – 09:30 Introduction to the field of Religion, Gender, Sexuality and Activism by dr. Kristin Aune (Coventry University, UK)

09:30 – 10:15 Keynote 1: “Queerphilic Xenophobia: Deadly Effects of Dominant Constructions of a Decolonial Muslim Woman Leader in France”, Professor Paola Bacchetta, University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A.

Abstract: This presentation addresses how gender, sexuality, colonialism and Islamophobia can get deployed together at once to break solidarities within and across new social movements, and what we might do to avoid this situation. It invokes a recent high profile controversy in France in which Houria Bouteldja, co-founder and spokesperson for the decolonial movement and party called *Parti des Indigènes de la République*, was very publicly accused of being intensely queerphobic. During a TV interview Bouteldja had been asked about gay marriage and had responded that: (1) gay practices exist in the *banlieues* (suburban slums) but there are many other important issues there besides gay marriage such as unemployment, police brutality, education and (2) there is no such thing as a “universal” gay identity. Though Bouteldja was merely invoking points made in a plethora of recent queer of colour and queer decolonial research and activism, she was immediately publicly attacked as hyper queerphobic. A long debate by social movement activists, journalists and scholars ensued across the French media. This presentation analyses how at present, the new homonationalist acceptance of queers is being used to intensify Islamophobia and to demobilise decolonial and radical queer of color movements, often with deadly consequences for the people such movements mobilise and defend. In her concluding remarks Professor Bacchetta proposes ways to avoid such fragmentations and instead to create and strengthen solidarity across genders, sexualities, decolonialities, religions and secularisms.

10:15 – 10:45 Response by professor Sarah Bracke, Harvard University, U.S.A. / Ghent University, Belgium + Q&A

10:45 – 11:00 *Coffee break*

11:00 – 11:45 Keynote 2: “Gateway to a Neoliberal Future: Sex and Secularism in the Seventies”, Professor Janet Jakobsen, Barnard College / Columbia University, New York, U.S.A.

Abstract: The years making up the 1970s are generally understood as a turning point for secular politics in the United States. Not only does this decade mark a peak in movements for women’s liberation and sexual liberation, but they are also viewed as a turning point in the development of a right-wing, often specifically Christian, politics of sexual regulation. The years of the 1970s are also generally regarded as the originary period for the economic and political formations that have been drawn together under the term “neoliberalism”. Histories of the decade focus on singular explanations for the economic, political, and cultural shifts of the period. My concern is not just to tell a more complete story of the 1970s, but also to interrupt the type of narrative that pulls out a singular social relation – whether religion, gender, class, race, economics, politics or trade – as the key to, or even one of the keys, to the decade and its ramifications on those that followed. Rather than a causal explanation, to which all of these analyses are committed, I propose a relational analysis that uses a queer

understanding of religion to reconfigure not just our understanding of the religion-secular relation, but also the *interacting relations* that make the 1970s foundational for contemporary social formations.

11:45 – 12:30 Response by professor Ulrike Auga, Humboldt Universität, Berlin, Germany + Q&A

12:30 – 14:30 *Lunch. Organisers, lecturers and respondents are invited for lunch. Restaurant Mezzabar. Adress: Oudburg 31, 9000 Gent.*

14:30 – 15:30 Workshops – parallel group discussions. Moderated by Kristin Aune (Coventry University, U.K.), Sarah Bracke (Harvard University, U.S.A. / Ghent University, Belgium), Nadia Fadil (Catholic University Leuven, Belgium) & Gily Coene (Free University Brussels, Belgium)

1	Kristin Aune	<p>Dynamics between (new) forms of activism and (new) religious/secular profiling in multicultural societies</p> <p>For example: What types of activism emerge in the face of changing religious and secular landscapes in various locations, as well as new forms of religious and secularist profiling, confrontation and (identity) politics in public debates? How do activists' concerns, argumentation and styles and forms of activism respond to new challenges in contemporary multicultural societies?</p>
2	Sarah Bracke	<p>Religion, gender and activism in a context of globalization: postcolonial critique and international solidarity</p> <p>For example: How do issues of gender and sexuality shape global religious and secular politics? What causes the growth of homo-nationalism, how is it related to religion and secularism, and how does it affect activism? What is the meaning of international solidarity? What are the conditions of possibility to reach and practice international solidarity through activism? Do religious-secular differences between movements and activists play a role in building international solidarity?</p>
3	Nadia Fadil	<p>Emergence of new religious/secular and sexual/"sexularist" normativities and subjectivities</p> <p>For example: Do activisms in various locations produce different kinds of religious, secular, racial, ethnic and sexual normativities? What kind of religious and gendered subjectivities do various kinds of activisms contest, produce or enable?</p>

4	Gily Coene	<p>Doing feminist research on religion, gender & activism: methodological/ethical challenges</p> <p>For example: How do we produce, criticise, correct, rearrange and/or renew knowledge about religion and gender when starting from activist engagements and studying social movements? What ethical issues and questions may emerge from researching religion, gender and activism?</p>
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15:30 – 16:00 *Coffee break*

16:00 – 17:00 Continuation workshops – parallel group discussions part two. Moderated by Kristin Aune (Coventry University, U.K.), Sarah Bracke (Harvard University, U.S.A. / Ghent University, Belgium), Nadia Fadil (Catholic University Leuven, Belgium) & Gily Coene (Free University Brussels, Belgium)

17:00 – 18:00 Plenary session: observations and discussion introduced by observers. Moderated by Chia Longman, Ghent University, Belgium / Anne-Marie Korte, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

19:00 – 21:00 Network diner: organisers, lecturers and all afternoon participants invited!
Restaurant Harira & Co. Adress: Oudburg 5, 9000 Gent.