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# **Traces of Secularism in Danish Development Policy on Gender Equality**

*Understanding How Religion is Framed as a Threat to  
Women in the Discourses Surrounding Danish  
Development Cooperation 2017-2019*

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## Abstract

The thesis seeks to do a discursive analysis of the articulation of religion's role in promoting gender equality in Danish development policies. The empirical material analysed is that of official development policies regarding gender equality and statements from the Minister of Development Cooperation in the area of gender equality and freedom of religion and belief. The thesis draws on theories of secularism, Danish secularism and secular feminism and investigates the empirical material determining to which extent the construction of religion's role on gender equality reflects secularist ideologies. The thesis concludes that discourses of secularism guide the understanding of gender equality and religion's role in gender equality in multiple ways.

## 1. Introduction

*"If change is to be something that people own and engage in, it needs to be rooted in people's convictions, their conceptual world and their belief."*

(Thomsen, Appendix A, 2018: 3, my translation)

In 1882, Nietzsche declared God dead and mankind the killer, leaving humankind in an unknown land where humans would have to become gods themselves (Nietzsche 2006:136). Here, 136 years later, this very idea still lives on in the theories of secularization and political ideals of separation of politics and religion, while at the same time the vast majority of the world's population adhere to a religion and God does not seem to be dead at all.

In 2015, 84% of the world population adhered to a religion and according to the same study by 2060 only 9% of the babies born, will be born to mothers who do not "affiliate" with a religion, as opposed to the 16 % non-affiliated today (Hackett and McClendon 2017). To the majority of the world's population, God is not dead, but very much alive. The religious world population is growing, thus the religiously affiliated individuals will continue to make up the vast majority of the world's population, where the two biggest religions continue to be Christianity and Islam. As published by the World Economic Forum:

*"As religious diversity and religious populations grow, so does their potential impact, creating new challenges and opportunities for societies, governments and economies."* (Grim 2015).

Religions offer normative guidelines in life and present answers for ethical questions within religious philosophies. Religions can be interpreted to guide issues that are essential to our lives, such as who we can marry, the rights to your own body, what clothes to wear. The core values that are connected to religion also offer normative norms related to gender issues such as abortion, gay marriage, contraception, veiling, circumcision, polygamy and so on. The

religious arguments and normative guidelines can seem somewhat distant in the context of a society such as the Danish. In Denmark, only 8% of the population rank themselves as highly religious (Evans and Baronavski 2018), politicians per se do not state their religion nor use religiously founded arguments, as can be seen in e.g. the U.S. presidential debate, and religion is not very visible in the public space, although this might be slowly changing. This dichotomy might present a challenge in a global context. This has also been the case in the political area of development. Within development policies a topic that is highly contradictory is that of women's rights or gender equality rights, where various stakeholders hold opposite agenda. The Catholic Church's non-member status in the UN, The Holy See, has been known to lobby effectively and strongly against sexual health and reproductive health rights (SHRH) (Ford 2014). Religious arguments are therefore controversial and seen as negative to e.g. SHRH promoters in the international arena. It therefore seems interesting to dive into this aspect of religion in relation to gender equality in development policy. How does religion or the opposal of the same affect the way in which we understand gender equality? Gender equality is perhaps by most understood as a universal term, defined by the Human Rights Declaration and The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). But does gender equality look the same everywhere in the world and how is it informed by inclusion of religious arguments or the lack of the same?

With the knowledge of a more and more religiously affiliated world, I wish to look closer at how the Danish development policy on gender equality is being articulated in relation to religion.

In the current Danish development strategy, The World 2030, development is being approached through four strategic aims, where of one is Freedom and development – democracy, human rights and gender equality (MFA and Danida 2017:6).

Furthermore, the Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, Ms. Ulla Tørnæs, priorities Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, promoting gender equality and appears as a strong advocate for gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights and health.

When it comes to a gender focus in development policies and strategies, the role of religion has been highly overlooked or seen as negative (Tomalin 2006:94) from outside the community of Faith Based Organisations (FBO's)<sup>1</sup>.

So, what does the Danish strategy on SDG5 and gender equality in the development strategy entail and what type of feminism does this express? How does the factor of the Danish religious demography and the “secular” society and the ideology behind play into the understanding of what gender equality is? And last, but not least, when this approach is set aiming to achieve gender equality for all, how does this approach affect religious individuals, partners, target audiences, and their world views?

There are many studies of how religion and a religious state have negative influences on gender equality, but how is gender equality understood in a secular state, in this specific case Denmark in connotation to development aid and development cooperation?

Secularism and religion are subjects that have been discussed greatly in the fields of sociology of religion, sociology, political science, and international relations. Its connection to gender equality has been less explored and when it has been so, it has often been from the perspective of religion as an obstacle to gender equality.

By following the arguments of political scientist Ole Wæver, I will investigate whether the notion of secularism and gender equality is closely connected and how it is used to portrait religious women and men in a certain way.

## 1. 1 Problem formulation

### **How are secularist ideologies expressed in Danish development discourses on religion and its relation to gender equality?**

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<sup>1</sup> Faith Based Organisation (FBO) is traditionally an NGO working from a religious set of values

By answering the above problem formulation, the thesis sets out to understand how the notion of gender equality in Denmark can be understood in the context of the Danish version of secularism and which dilemmas occur when it is being exported into an international, and in many ways more and more religiously affiliated, world.



## 2. Methodology

In the following sections I will position myself in regard to academia, subjectivity and embodiment. I will determine my ontological and epistemological stances and present the empirical material, the discursive approach applied to the material and considerations regarding the hermeneutical research process.

### 2.1 Academic Positioning

The academic stance in this thesis is in the intersection of development studies and gender studies however it is not a traditional development approach, since theories of secularism and feminism guide the analysis. The master studies program Social Studies of Gender at Graduate School at Lund University is an interdisciplinary master, which means that the master thesis combines the student's bachelor discipline and the discipline of gender studies. The bachelor disciplines in this thesis are International Development Studies and Cultural Encounters from Roskilde University and therefore the master thesis is located under Human Geography at Lund University. The aim of the thesis is therefore to intersect the field of International Development Studies and Gender Studies. Since I have used the master programme educating myself within Gender Studies, the focus of the thesis will be on issues that are perhaps most present in Gender Studies, but which are therefore also important to include in the bigger field of Development Studies.

The problem field for this assignment is the connection between secularist views on religion and the ideas about gender equality in development policy.

In order to make a solid foundation for the analysis to dissect my empirical material, I make use of 4 scholars, each contributing with a unique focus. The two feminist scholars, Saba Mahmood and Emma Tomalin provide a gendered approach, where Mahmood focuses on the discursive paradoxes of political secularism and Tomalin on the specific nexus of religion and gender in development. To cast a light on how society's construction is in relation to a sociological phenomenon such as secularism, I make use of Jose Casanova, and

finally, I involve theory concerning political discourse by Ole Wæver, which I apply in the context of development policy.

By using these different approaches to the field and the material, I find that their complimentary approaches each helps to shine a light on the empirical material, providing a better understanding of the problem field.

## 2.2 Situating Myself

In the above I have situated the thesis in relation to my academic background. I will briefly explain how I situate myself. As a scholar of Gender Studies, I am marked by feminists thinking and scholars that are concerned with issues of inequality on different levels. I am writing from the perspective of a female, white, middle class, Danish citizen, who is in many ways sceptical towards religion. I was myself baptised and chose to have a Christian confirmation, but view myself as what in Danish is referred to as "a cultural Christian". It is therefore the exact perspective that I perhaps myself represent that I wish to look further into: A Danish secular feminist perspective.

Doing so, I follow Mahmood's ideas, where she tries to understand the lives of others knowing her own background, applying a skeptical approach to her own political standpoint, being aware that she doesn't necessarily shares the commitments of the field and the people involved (Mahmood, 2005: xi). In this thesis, I look critically at the Danish development discourse in relation to its arguments when 'justifying' promoting gender equality. This does not mean that I do not still believe in gender equality and find it necessary and most important to work for the rights of women, men and other gender identities across the globe and acknowledge women and other marginalised groups disadvantaged positions globally. But I still find it fruitful to look critically at my own political believes and those of others that surround me and question the discursive 'take-for-grantedness' of the arguments and reasonings.

## 2.3 Philosophy of Social Science

Where I previously described the academic positioning of the thesis and how I situate myself in the making of the thesis, I will now shortly focus on this thesis' ontological and epistemological position.

### 2.3.1 Ontology

The ontological stance in the thesis is that of social constructionism (Burr 2015:11).

By saying this, I see and understand everything as constructed in a social relation and both people and things come into being in the relational and therefore religion, development, secularism and gender equality are thus not solid and shaped already existing objects that come into being in specific contexts, but are created and recreated constantly in an environment consisting of individuals each affecting themselves and each other, making and changing the constructions of concepts such as e.g. religion and gender equality in a never stagnant process. Reality is therefore also contextual and historical (Burr, 2015: 223). This described environment and the concepts that are developed and formed within it comes to *live* only by the means of the individuals that *creates* it and *acts* upon it in an interdependent social relation and process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014: 271).

Therefore, these concepts can be understood through the discourses in which they come to “live”. I will return to the thesis’ discursive approach in section 2.2.1.

### 2.3.2 Epistemology

My epistemological standpoint derives from the feminist standpoint theory. I work from the position of the theory of ‘Situated Knowledge’ as coined by Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1988). Haraway speaks of the feminist objectivity (Haraway, 1988: 518), but it is not so much this notion of objectivity that I am interested in as I am still working within the ontological frame of social constructivism (Burr 2015:11).

However, her notions on how subjectivity needs to be situated is what appeals to me (Haraway, 1988: 589). The epistemological framework from which I am operating is thus one that originates in feminist thinking and from a place of understanding how to deal with the concept of objectivity in a matter, so it also encompasses other subjects than solely the white male (Haraway, 1998: 585). Following this operational process, I use it to position myself as an academic,

stating that I am aware that I am situated in a specific context and body (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014: 66-68). While Haraway has a feminist political ambition with her writings, I instead place myself in a position trying to understand and describe rather than using my findings to promote a specific – and with a social constructionist approach – created truth.

This critique also entails her vision of having “...an earth- wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different-and power-differentiated - communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life.” (Haraway 1988:579–80). This, I understand as a solidarity within the epistemological position and a standpoint that allows for an analysis of sites that are not known to one and to bring new perspectives or situatedness into the academic life while acknowledging the power relations in play.

I understand situated knowledge as an acknowledgement of the space that individuals are able to talk in and from and as the embodiment from which one is speaking (Haraway, 1988, 583). By this, I see the world through, not only my eyes, but through my body (Haraway, 1988, 583, 589). This gives another angle to the subjectivity that is the modus of bodily experience. I am thus applying this understanding of myself in an academic position as being not only my subjectivity, but also my bodily experiences and existence.

Therefore, the analysis and its conclusions in this thesis are results of both my own views, educational background, and my position as a white western woman as explained in the introduction to the methodology chapter.

### **2.3.3 Hermeneutic Qualitative Research Approach**

Working with the empirical material in this thesis, I approach it using a hermeneutical interpretational framework. In order to motivate this approach, I will shortly describe how I use it actively and what outcomes I find it to have for my conclusions and work with the empirical material.

In this thesis I conduct a qualitative study, where I interpret text material and spoken words, subtracting specific discourses, looking for meaning in the words and paragraphs. Since I am analysing material that is not authored by one person, but rather serves as a proof of the sum of different political interests, I am not as such looking at the intention behind the text or statement as a result of a human subject (Thisted, 2011: 61), but rather find it a discourse that is the result of political ideologies. What I do take from the hermeneutic analysis, is the recognition that there is an intention and meaning behind a given text or speech act and that this communicative item, be it presented written or orally, can be interpreted by the researcher through theory and by applying a certain theoretical grid over the communicated item, which entails a specific analytical approach to the item. The analysis is in this regard a product that describes the text on the basis of my interpretation which together with my theoretical approach to the text is determined by my pre-understandings, that again after having been influenced by what I see and understand within the empirical material stands as a new base layer for my understanding of the findings and their positions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2014:214).

While I do not follow a strict focus using the hermeneutical circle as a concrete method to interpret the empirical material, but rather see myself applying a discursive approach, where the text is scrutinized for specific discourses, I continuously seems to extract cues leading back to a hermeneutical stand and process in my work with the empirical data and the thesis, which is why I find it important to mention, since it is somehow shaping my approach to and work with the thesis and the empirical material (Thisted, 2011:61).

## **2.4 Inspirational forums**

I have now described how I situate myself, the thesis, and the science-philosophical starting point for the thesis. Now, to give a perspective of my individual pre-understandings that have framed this thesis, I want to describe the main aspects of the process that lead to the theme and subject of the thesis.

The process of arriving at the problem field and the theoretical, empirical, as well as methodological approach began with an interest in the international development work done – and not done just as importantly – by the Danish government and its agencies, that emerged during my internship at the Danish NGO Folkekirkens Nødhjælp, also named DanChurchAid (DCA). DCA is a Faith Based Organisation (FBO), which in DCA's case refers to a Christian approach in the development and humanitarian aid that the organisation works with and provides. During my internship at the International Department of DCA, I became familiar with religion as a factor in development, how this can be considered when organising development work, and its importance for many people all around the world. With my background in gender studies, I naturally found an interest in how and what the role of religion was understood when it came to gender equality.

With this understanding and knowledge, I chose to look further into more of the relevant literature in my internship assignment and found that in the recent literature on both religion, development and religion, and development and gender, the author that kept reappearing was Emma Tomalin.

From her literature I found that the concepts of; fundamentalism, religious feminism, and the nexus between religion and gender were of relevance when understanding the *intersection* of gender and religion in development.

I attended a conference held at the Danish Parliament regarding freedom of religion in foreign affairs and hereunder development policy (Globalnyt 2017). Here, Ole Wæver, professor at the department of political science at Copenhagen University and one of the authors of the theory of securitization, attended. I therefore discovered that he had written about secularism and the Danish secularism having already discovered theories on secular and religious feminism I drew in the theories of secularism.

During my internship a new unit Freedom of Religion and Belief at the Danish MFA was established (MFA III 2018). I closely followed the development both regarding the political and the organisational modus in the Danish parliament, government and within the Development Ministry itself, a branch of the MFA.

I conducted two investigatory interviews with the senior advisors Jørgen Thomsen and Elsebeth Gravgard at DCA to understand more about the assumptions I was starting to form based on the literature.

## 2.5 Empirical Material

The empirical material consists of;

### *Official publications on Denmark's Development Cooperation 2017-2021<sup>2</sup>*

- The World 2030 (MFA and Danida 2017)
- The Government's Priorities for Danish Development Cooperation 2019 (MFA I 2018)
- The Government's Priorities for Danish Development Cooperation 2018 (MFA II 2017)

### *Video, articles and speech regarding freedom of religion and belief and gender equality*

- Video material of the Minister for Development Cooperation Ulla Tørnæs (Venstre 2018)
- The article *Nadias kamp for frihed er vores fælles kamp* by Ulla Tørnæs (Tørnæs 2018b)
- The interview *Ulla Tørnæs: Nu skal religionsfrihed kobles til køn* with Ulla Tørnæs (Lyng 2018)
- The written words from the speech *Udviklingsminister Ulla Tørnæs tale ved tematiske session om Kvinder og Religions- og Trosfrihed på 2. møde i Kontaktforum for Religions- og Trosfrihed den 13. juni 2018 i Landstingssalen* (Tørnæs 2018a)

Above I have merely stated what the empirical material consists of, and I will therefore now elaborate on the content of the different empirical materials.

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<sup>2</sup> In fiscal years.

### 2.5.2 Official documents

The official strategy for Denmark's development cooperation and humanitarian aid 'The World 2030' is the result of a settlement across party lines with all parties in the Danish parliament, except the left winged socialist party Enhedslisten (Gormsen 2017). The settlement was reached on the 18th of January 2017 (ibid.).

The discourse in the strategy The World 2030, as well as the previous political strategies within the field, are important because they create the framework that sets the tone for the Danish development cooperation, not only in the multilateral and bilateral agreements Denmark chooses to enter, but also for e.g. NGO's and private businesses to play into. As Thomsen describes it: *"This is [the strategy] what the Danish government sees as the Danish role in international development work"* (Thomsen, Appendix A 2018: 8). The official Danish development strategy (policy) is thus the frame for what projects and initiatives that are eligible for funding through Danida, a department under the MFA working with development cooperation (MFA 2019).<sup>3</sup>

*"The government's priorities for Danish development cooperation 2019' sums up important priorities in the Finance Bill for 2019, and it should be seen as a 'Year 3' implementation of The World 2030."* (MFA I 2018)

With and based on The World 2030, the Danish government (STM 2019)<sup>4</sup> prioritises the development aid and its development cooperation. The government's priorities for Danish development cooperation 2018 and 2019 are thus the government's financial and political prioritization based on the strategy and are a part of the bigger fiscal legislation, the Finance Bill, listing the state's budget for the following year.

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<sup>3</sup> The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs holds 3 ministers in total: The Minister of Foreign Affairs, The Minister of Development Cooperation, and The Minister for Fisheries and Equal Opportunities and Nordic Cooperation (UM, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> When The World 2030 was politically settled and published in 2017, the government was (and is still) that of Lars Løkke Rasmussen III (STM, 2019).



### 2.5.3 Other materials of relevance

Besides these official documents, I have chosen to include two articles, a video and the written word for a speech with Ulla Tørnæs, the Minister for Development Cooperation, which all are articulations from the minister on intersection of freedom of religion and belief, and gender equality.

The interview "*Nu skal religionsfrihed kobles til køn*" (*Now Freedom of Religion is to be Coupled with Gender*) was given shortly after the newly opened unit for Freedom of Religion and Belief was launched at the MFA. The background for the unit dates to august 2017, when the Danish fiscal legislation was being negotiated and a proposal by the Conservative Party was included in the Government's final proposed Finance Bill for 2018, which involved opening an office or unit under the MFA, that was to deal with persecution of Christian minorities and their freedom of religion and belief (Kristeligt Dagblad 2017). Two million DKK were prioritized for the unit, which was officially launched on the 10th of January 2018 (MFA IV 2018).

Today, it entails two employees (of which one is part time) and although the initial discourse was concerned with religious minorities, the agenda was widened to entail Freedom of Religion and Belief (ibid.). In launching the unit, a Contact Forum was held, in which organisations that were interested in the unit's agenda were invited to attend (ibid.). I attended this meeting as an intern at Danish Church Aid (DCA) at the time. At the event, the head of the unit, Franz Michael Melbin, gave most of the introduction, speaking of the possibilities for the office, but the Forum was also attended by the Minister of Development Cooperation, Ulla Tørnæs. Ms. Tørnæs gave a speech about how women's marginalised roles in relation to freedom of religion and belief was going to be one of the strings that the office would follow and focused on how this would be a thematic focal point for the office (Hansen 2018; Thomsen 2017). On the 13th of June 2018 there was second meeting of this kind where the theme was solely gender equality, to which I was unfortunately not able to attend. The unit for Freedom of Religion and Belief has since provided me with the script from the speech Ulla Tørnæs gave at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Contact Forum on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2018, which I am drawing into the analysis. The two final sources are an article that the Ministers wrote after returning from the Ministerial To Advance Religious

Freedom, a ministerial on the topic of freedom of religion and belief held by the U.S. State Department in Washington July 24-26<sup>th</sup> 2018 (US State 2018), and a video, published by Venstre (The Liberal Party of Denmark), which Ms. Tørnæs made before leaving for the ministerial.

#### **2.5.4 Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews**

In addition to the material from the MFA, I conducted two interviews at the early stages of the thesis process, with Senior Advisor on International Ecumenical Cooperation and Religion and Development, Jørgen Thomsen, from DCA and Senior Advisor on Active Citizenship & Gender Equality, Elsebeth Gravgaard, also from DCA, as investigatory interviews in order to acquire more knowledge about the subject. Part of the interviews turned out to be relevant as expert input throughout the thesis. Both advisors have been working at the DCA for numerous years and holds high degrees of expertise within the field of gender and religion in development, that is the thematic viewpoint of this thesis. The two advisors are also familiar with the MFA and collaborate with the MFA for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) each year, where DCA is part of the Danish delegation and Jørgen Thomsen provides knowledge and opinions on the unit at the MFA (Gravgaard 2017; Thomsen 2017; MFA III 2018; MFA IV 2018).

The interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, which provides me with the possibilities of aligning my questions with the remarks from the interviewees, so the interviewees can focus on what they make meaning of and thus where they have an in-depth knowledge that is useful for me (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014: 173-176).

Given that I am working from an ontological and epistemological place of social construction I am aware that the interviews are a result of my specific focus and situatedness, the questions I asked and how I responded to the answers, while also my person and the relationship I have with the interviewees and the other way around, the interviewee's focus, agenda and relation to me has determined the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 328-329). It might be noted that the two interviewees are my previous supervisors while I was completing an

internship at DCA. Therefore, I was aware of their knowledge, but also knew that they would be an entrance into exploring the field more, and therefore chose to interview them as a way to explore the problem field further, using them as gateway keepers to the field (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, 69).

Furthermore, the analysis of the empirical material is a result of what I have chosen to focus on, and what I find relevant, while at the same time being a result of the discourses that are present in the material. I am giving the words certain meaning and choosing in which way to interpret them, but I am not bringing them into being as such.

## 2.6 Discursive Analysis

*“...discourse analysis as ‘the close study of language and language use as evidence of aspects of society and social life’.”*

(Taylor 2013:3)

Discourse is a word that has been conceptualized in various ways and it therefore needs clarification here, which understanding of discourse I am referring to when conducting a discourse analysis. Foucault understands discourse as a broad concept, which Burr refers to as the macro approach (Burr, 2015: 224), where “... discourses are widely prevalent ways of talking about or otherwise representing... people or things and these discourses function to construct and maintain our understanding of those people and things in social life.” (Burr 2015:224) Discourse from this perspective is not just a matter of language, but is understood as what reality consists of. Discourses are what make up our conception of the world and those that ‘set’ the discourses have relative power. Discourses here are both the ‘bigger’ discourses e.g. how we understand religion, and the discourses that are possible within this discourse and it is the non-verbal. This makes the concept quite abstract and difficult to manoeuvre while it also incorporates the structures of power that are related to controlling the dominant discourses and seeing knowledge as power (Burr 2015:224).

Although I am in agreement with Foucault I am not attempting to do a societal discourse analysis to find the 'dominant discourses', I am also not going into the micro-perspective where it is grammar and linguistics solely that are the course of analysis (Burr, 2015). Instead I am approaching discourse as a compromise of these two poles and look at concrete textual discourses and relate them to bigger societal phenomena. I am however not looking at the grammar, but instead analysing the linguistics of the texts in relation to theoretical concepts, but linking the overall themes to social phenomena (Taylor 2013:3) One could say that analysing the specific discourses in the text and statements and contextualising them with the broader ideals of Danish secularism is the same as understanding the specific discourse in a broader discourse, but for the sake of simplicity discourse will only be used to describe the 'micro-perspective'. I am not applying a specific discourse analysis theory, since it is the concepts presented in the theoretical chapter that guide the approach to the empirical material.

## 2.7 Limitations and limits

I am aware that I am approaching the empirical material from a specific angle. I am accepting the theoretical condition about a Danish secularism and that this is closely linked with our ideas of gender equality. Therefore, when I am looking at the intersection between ideas of gender equality and religion / secularism it means that I am leaving out other factors that influence how gender equality is understood and what women's role in society is understood or framed. I am aware that the Danish nation state also is a universal welfare state which gives certain possibilities, such as day care, and through that the dual-breadwinner model where both parents are working parents is mostly applied (Siim 2000:108). The thesis does not set out to investigate how the Danish welfare state through its benefits is part of framing women's role in society and through that the dominant ideas of gender equality, but seeks to look more specifically at how secularism influences the way in which the Danish state, in the (form) of the Danish Strategy The World 2030 and related documents alongside the

Development Minister exports specific ideas of gender equality in the development strategy and in official statements. The thesis does not set out to question that the Danish democratic state has been beneficial to gender equality and women's rights. More so it looks at how gender equality is understood in the current Danish development policy discourses, through the representation of the politicians and whether this can be understood in the light of a secularist understanding of gender equality.

In this paper I am first and foremost looking at the discursive creation of the development strategy and will not go much into the financial aspects.

While authors such as Tomalin argue for the need to engage religious leaders and organisations and FBO's (Tomalin, 2011: 3), I will not be giving a normative analysis of the measures taken in development regarding gender equality and religion, rather limiting myself to a descriptive discursive analysis of the Danish development strategy.

There are scholars describing how both secularist and religious policies that can promote gender inequality and I am not aiming to make a normative evaluation of whether secular or religious discourses in policies are promoting gender equality to a (more or lesser degree), but rather trying to illustrate how secular values can be seen in ideas of gender equality and problematize this as universal values, in a world that is made up of largely religious individuals.

### 3. Theory

Above, I have laid out the methodological approach in this thesis, situating myself and the thesis in a social constructionist perspective, which is also reflected in the theories and theorists that I base my analysis upon. So, to analyse whether the political discourse on gender equality in Danish development policy reflect certain secular assumptions, I have chosen to use Ole Wæver and Jose Casanova's theorizations of secularism. Furthermore, I draw on Saba Mahmood's theories of Christianity and western ideals in secularism in a discussion of the relation between secularism and Christianity.

When delving into ideals of secularism in discourses on gender equality, I am drawing on theories of secular and religious feminism, primarily using Emma Tomalin and her approaches, along with her arguments related to fundamentalism and gender equality.

#### 3.1 Theories of secularism

Ole Wæver is a political scientist known for coining the theory of securitization, also known as the Copenhagen School (van Munster 2012). Since, Wæver has expanded his authorship to include analyses of secularism and the role of religion in the political sphere, both nationally and internationally (Wæver 2008; Wæver 2011a; Wæver 2011b). With his specific knowledge of Denmark and the Danish political context combined with his understanding of the dichotomy of religion on the one side and secularism on the other in the Danish society, I will incorporate Wæver's findings as they help shed light on the secularist – or so portrayed – national context in which the Danish development strategy is verbalized.

Jose Casanova is a scholar of sociology of religion and his body of work concentrates on globalization, religions and secularization (GU 2017). In this thesis I am drawing on his reflections and conceptualizations of secularism and secularization.

Saba Mahmood, late professor of Anthropology at the UC Berkley (UC Berkeley 2018), whose work focused on the relationship between religious and secular politics in postcolonial societies with special attention to issues of sovereignty, subject formation, law, relational subjectivity, and gender (ibid). Her work is best known for its interrogation of liberal assumptions about the proper boundary between ethics and politics, freedom and unfreedom, the religious and the secular, and agency and submission (Mahmood 2012).

Emma Tomalin, professor of Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds, has among other publications authored a large handbook of religions and global development (Tomalin 2018; Tomalin 2015). Her academic writings have been focussed on how religious dynamics have been neglected by the secular global elites using feminism and religious feminism as the rooting point, stating that working effectively for gender equality in a development sphere, involvement of local faith actors and consideration of religious dynamics are vital and not underestimated as previously (Tomalin 2018).

### 3.1.1 Distinguishing secularization and secularism

What entails the secular? The separation of state and church or of religion and politics? A secular state can be determined as a state where state and church is separated, but at the same time a country like Denmark is understood as secular although it does not live up to this idea of a secular state (Wæver and Sheikh 2012). The term secular encompasses different levels and understandings, which I will not go further into, but will instead look into the ideological perspective of secularism, that is rather a discourse that promotes the secular, in the form that the given secularism defines. Firstly, I will look at secularization to demonstrate the influence it has had on discourses of secularism.

*Secularization is a societal process in which the influence of religion on society is weakened. (Wæver 2008:209–10)*

### 3.1.1.1 The 'Marks' of Secularization Theory

Theories of secularization stem from the 1960's and the sociologist Peter Berger, that initially proposed secularization as a universal societal development (Reaves 2012). In these traditional theories of secularization, secular societies are seen as modern societies that have gone through a natural societal development where secularization is the inevitable by-product of modernization (ibid.). As Casanova describes it: *"Secularization... usually refers to actual or alleged empirical-historical patterns of transformation and differentiation of the institutional spheres of 'the religious' ... and 'the secular'... from early modern to contemporary societies."* (Casanova 2009:1050).

In this theoretical portrayal, modernization and secularization are linked, and secularization becomes a feature of the state and its society. The theory of secularization presents the decrease of religion as *"...a universal process of societal development..."*(Casanova 2006:12).

This understanding of secularization as a somewhat linear process that is a feature of the state has seen been punctured by Peter Berger himself (Reaves 2012; Thomsen 2017:2). Since, other approaches to secularization have been proposed by e.g. Casanova. Casanova finds, that a comparative approach to studying secularization would ensure a comparative historical analysis to lay out the various patterns of secularization, based on three determinators of the concept, which Casanova establish as; a decline of religious belief, as privatization of religion, and as differentiation of the secular spheres (Casanova, 2006: 7-8).

While the more universal features of secularization have been dismissed, it is still visible in what Wæver refers to as secularism which I will elaborate in the coming section.

Another aspect of secularization is European Christian historicity being universalized. The secularization formation in Europe thus builds upon: *"... the*



*secularist genealogy of modernity [that] was constructed as a triumphant emancipation of reason, freedom, and worldly pursuits from the constraints of religion.” (Casanova, 2006: 11)*

Moreover, the idea of secularization as a necessity for modernization, as another way of reaching for and obtaining the linear model for development where all societies will achieve the same level of development due to a predetermined transition following the same path towards “enlightenment and democracy”, the idea of secularization and modernization becomes problematic when it is applied as a “one solution fits all” and as a ‘demand’ for democracy based on ideals and assumptions stemming from a European specificity (Fortin 2012:905).

Knowing this as the normative background, a highly Eurocentric and Western oriented basis, gives a background for understanding the secularisms that exist and the specific secularism in Denmark bound by these thoughts (Casanova 2006:10; Fortin 2012:910).

### **3.1.2 Secularism**

In the above I have illustrated the original theory of secularization as a demonstration of what the thoughts of secularism springs from. In this part, I will look further into the concept of secularism. Secularism differs from secularization since it is not a theory of how modern societies develop, but rather a normative political doctrine or ideology that idealises separation of religion and politics. Casanova describes secularism as; “... a whole range of modern secular worldviews and ideologies...” (Casanova 2009:1051). These worldviews, or ideologies “...may be consciously held and explicitly elaborated into... normative-ideological state projects, into projects of modernity and cultural programs. Or... viewed as an epistemic knowledge regime that may be unreflexively held and phenomenologically assumed as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern reality, as a modern doxa or as an ‘unthought’.” (Casanova 2009:1051).

These ideologies, or worldviews, can be expressed consciously and explicitly as or it has been a discourse in the sense where it is never questioned since it is so naturalized, and secularism is taken for granted and through that becomes 'somewhat invisible' as an epistemological approach to the world. Furthermore, secularism is materialized as various secular worldviews (Casanova 2009:1049-51) and must be understood as particular, opposed to a single case in a bigger universal secularism (Wæver 2011a:181). As an analytical approach it can be distinguished between a modern statecraft principle and an ideology, where the statecraft doctrine does not presuppose nor needs to hold a positive or negative 'theory' of religion (Casanova 2009: 1049-1051).

On the other hand, secularism as an ideology is when there is a theory and thus an *"...assumption that 'religion', in the abstract is a thing that has an essence or that produces certain particular and predictable effects that is the defining characteristics of modern secularism."* (Casanova 2009: 1051-52). I am however not sure I agree to the premise of Casanova's conclusion, where the political doctrine is neutral, since this principle must be based on a set of values and opinions regarding religion. And does the wish to separate state and church not imply that the state should not be related to religious institutions, thus politicising religion's impact? This can of course be based on a proposition to give equal room to all religious communities within the given society. Although I am not sure whether this can be done without an ideology behind that has a certain view on religion, it might be that this view does not have to be one that 'essentialises' religion, but recognises religious communities – which therefore in its essence is not secularism.

I will concentrate my analysis on the aspects of secularism as an ideology. Secularist ideologies shape what 'religion' is and how 'it' can operate in the public sphere while creating an **illusion that there is such a thing as 'religion'** (Mahmood, 2016: 3). There is a differentiation between this idea of 'religion' as a thing that is out there and the concrete referral to religions. When understanding religion as a social 'product' it does not exist as an essence or an exterior phenomenon outside the social sphere of individuals. More, following the social constructionist approach of this thesis, religion is to be understood as

a result of the omnipresent social interactions “...since religions are both in and of the social, and therefore will always, and already, reflect the mores, ideas, concerns, orientations, and ethos of the social body they emerge from or are adapted to.” (Juschka 2001:ix)

Casanova’s secularism as ideology relies on the construction of “...“the religious” [being] ... constituted by secular political and scientific discourses, so that “religion” itself as a historical category and as a universal globalized concept emerges as a construction of Western secular modernity.” (Casanova 2006: 10)

In my analysis, I will be applying the aspect of secularism as an ideology. Wæver does not in his authorship make the distinction between statecraft doctrine and secularism as an ideology, but I interpret his definition of secularism as attributing to the latter motion, where secularism is an ideology, based on Wæver’s description of secularism as “...a doctrine for how society ought to be. Religion and politics ought to be separated – and be protected against one another to ensure freedom of religion as well as religion-free politics.” (Wæver 2008:209). To Wæver, this ideology is not only a discourse that relates to religion and the doctrine of separation of politics and religion – hence the separation of church and state. Secularism is often woven into a larger reasoning of the state outwardly being neutral and that neutral decisions are to be made based on rational arguments (Wæver 2011:166) and “...it is more a general project shaping subjectivity to enable given kinds of society...” (Wæver 2008:216)

Secularism then functions as a specific discourse that sets norms for how society can function, not only on the aspects related to separation of church and state, but much broader, since it is ultimately a social construction, that has led to a constructed understanding of what values are part of the ‘national values’ (Wæver 2008:216).

The workings of secularism can according to Wæver be understood through three layers (Wæver, 2008: 223 – 224). The first layer being *a preference*, the second layer *a principle* and the third layer *a value for wider purposes* (Wæver 2008:223–224).

To enhance understanding the three layers, I will give an example of how secularism entails these three layers based on a national debate in Denmark from 2016: layer 1) should nurseries and kindergartens remove pork from the menu? This is firstly a question of *preference*, that is then answered with layer 2) *principle* of secularism e.g. not adjusting to one religious community's preferences in the public domain which is justified with layer 3) where this principle is inserted into a layer of presenting *values that serve a broader purpose*, here e.g. 'Danish identity' with pork meat being a defining aspect of Danish identity, where eating pork is a specific part of the Danish food culture that ought to be served on an equal footing along with other food products (The Guardian 2016).

Furthermore, secularism in certain versions entails a fear of religion (Wæver 2006:220). As the example above can portray a way to incorporate and be open to all religions in society when the state does not accommodate any particular religion, but refers to religion as a private matter. If essential for the family to keep a pork-free diet etc., it is possible to for the family to provide the child's own meal, but this is not the responsibility of the state. This can be presented as a way to include all religious equality in the public institutions. However, according to Wæver, secularism does not hold a neutral view on religion, but – at its extreme – a fear of religion and a wish for religion to be non-political and not to be given importance in political decisions such as which food is to be provided by public institutions (Wæver 2006:218).

### **3.1.2.1 The Protestant Christian DNA in Secularism**

Both the idea of religion as private and as a set of beliefs to which the individual agrees and the idea of secularism has its roots in Protestantism and was spread globally through e.g. missionary movements – at the same time, normative ideals of modernity as entailing secular values also stems from Protestantism (Mahmood 2009:843). Mahmood states that secularism entails a “... *particular normative conception of religion (that is largely Protestant Christian in its contours)*” (Mahmood 2009: 858).

Secularism has normative ideals of religion that derive from Protestantism, among others the nature of religion being a personal choice, where the individual “is offered” a set of beliefs to which it affirms and can therefore also choose if it does not want to accept or claim (Mahmood, 2009: 843)., This personal choice given the individual shaped the (Northern-)European identity, interlinking Christianity and secularism (Mahmood 2016:8). The secular rationality has come to define and shape vital parts of society such as law, statecraft, economic relations, and knowledge production from then and into the modern lived lives of today (Mahmood, 2009: 836). **Religion is thus seen as a personal choice.**

With this in mind, it resonates when Wæver describes Protestantism as more compatible with secularism than other religions, as the two constructions seems so interdependent (Wæver, 2008:215).

Protestantism is more compatible with secularism than other religions, since in Protestantism the relationship with God has been moved from the institutions and the priest to the individual. Religion is thus understood as private; between the individual and God) and this is the core understanding of religion that secularism encompasses since these ideals have ‘spilled over into secularism’ (Wæver, 2008: 215).

Knowing this, secularism thus entails the notion that it is not enough that politics is free of religion, religion must also be kept away from the political, and solely have its place in the private sphere (Wæver 2008:215; Wæver 2011a:165).

At the same time secularism draws religion into politics in order to oppose it (Wæver, 2008: 216) and perhaps highlights religion even more so, but it does not only highlight it by dismissing its legitimacy in the political and public arena, it also presupposes a specific ‘version of religion’ that derives from Protestantism.

Mahmood further finds that secular ideas of modernity embody protestant semiotic ideology, such as the **differentiation between object and subject**,

meaning that the religious subject should separate itself from divine objects: *“As any modern human being must understand, religious signs – such as the cross – are not embodiments of the divine but only stand in for the divine through an act of human encoding and interpretation.”* (Mahmood, 2009: 844).

In that sense secularism cannot encompass all religions equally since it has an incorporates bias towards Protestantism, which ontological perception colours the ideals of how religion should be ‘lived’ within the secularist space and is ultimately *“...a discursive operation of power...”* (Mahmood 2016:3). Therefore it is also argued that secularism is often reinforced in Northern Europe *“... because secularism is seen as a part of Protestantism and (thereby) part of national identity.”* (Wæver 2008:217). Wæver argues that if the dichotomy of secularism vs. anti-secularism were to be abolished, there would be room for how-debates where arguments for specific values such as gender equality, human rights, tradition etc. would shine through as opposed to a discussion of secularism as a given principle (Wæver, 2011: 165).

### **3.1.2.1 Summarising secularism**

Having seen different perspectives on secularism, is it clear that secularism is an analytical concept that enables the researcher to analyse ideologies or statecraft principles that are founded in arguments of the normative judgement the separation of politics of religion and politics of state (Mahmood, 2009: 836). Secularism is a contextual and diverse phenomena, conceptualising religion as a free and personal choice, originating and receiving much of its DNA from the Protestant belief system, which, although particular in its form, still entails an understanding of religion as an abstract with an essence that need to be controlled in one sense or the other.

With this knowledge of the more broad, overarching characteristics of secularism, I will now look into details of the more specific secularism in the

thesis case: Denmark, to put forward its discursal and normative influence on the Danish development policies from the MFA.

### 3.1.3 Danish Secularism

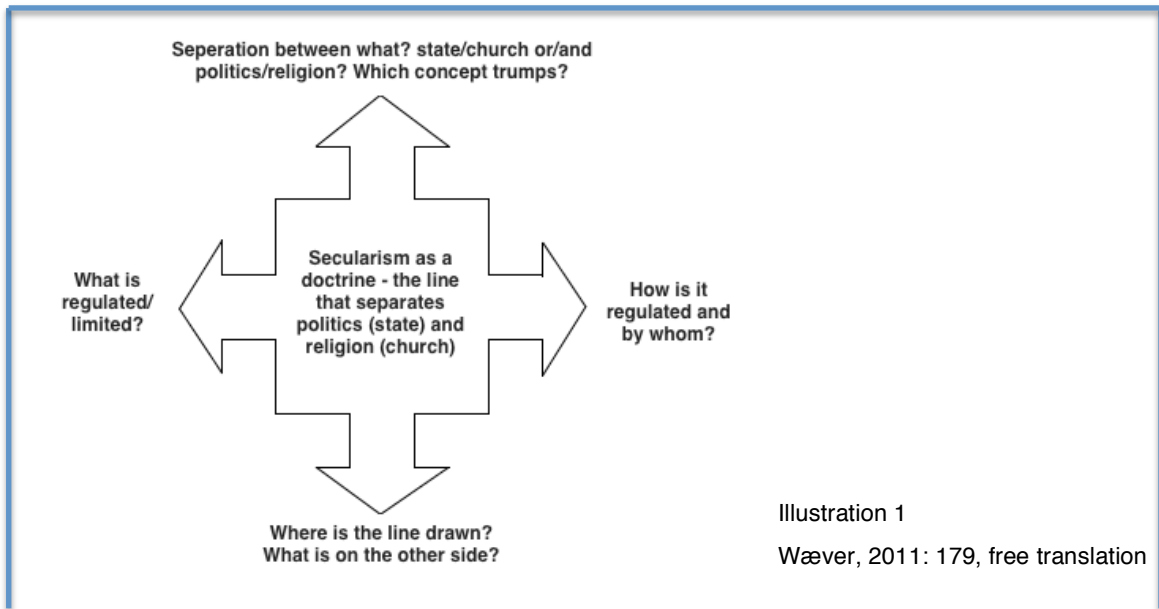
To examine the normative power of secularism, Wæver conducted a comparative study of the "results of secularism" in Germany, The United States and France while including Denmark throughout the analysis, examining how religion and politics and state and church are separated in the name of secularism (Wæver, 2006: 216). The findings showed that the variations are so big, that it is not possible to talk of variations of one dichotomic secularism, but instead linguistically referring to multiple forms of secularism, as the only thing the four cases had in common was the separation of something from something else, where one end of the spectrum is related to church and religion and the other to statecraft and politics. This also stresses that secularism, as everything else, is contextual and adjusted to the local socialisation between interdependent subjects.

As mentioned earlier secularism cannot be analysed as a universal phenomenon, but must be seen as multiple secularisms (Wæver 2011b:179–181).

When dealing with and analysing the empirical material in a discourse analysis, I, as also stated in the methodology chapter, understand the analysed secularism as a contextual, momentary secularism manifesting a discourse constructed by certain political actors, in this regard the Danish government of Lars Løkke Rasmussen III (Burr 2015:215; STM 2019). Thus, it is the context and situatedness of the subjects constructing the discourse, that determines and shapes the analysed secularism. Thus, when applying the models of Wæver and his approach of multiple secularism, I see to be as specific as possible on viewing the constructed discourses and Danish secularism as this momentary constructed discourse.

In the following I will present Wæver's conclusion to utilize these characteristics of Danish secularism in the analysis of the discourse on gender equality and religion in the Danish development strategy, The World 2030, and the empirical material relating to the strategy, e.g. the statements given by Minister Tørnæs.

The model that Wæver applies to determine the specificities of secularism is illustrated below.



In Illustration 1, we can see how there are four different aspects of the secular state, in which the characterisations of a given state can be placed in relation to the dichotomy of religion/politics or state/church, what, how and by whom regulation is taking place and where the line is drawn in relation to where religion is “acceptable”. Since I am interested in the ideological aspects here, I am not that interested in how e.g. church/ state is separated, but the argumentation behind. It is the discursive justification that is interesting. I find that Wæver also finds the statecraft principle that is materialised in the way the separation is made part of secularism as an ideology.

I will apply Wæver’s model to characterize the specificities of Danish secularism, thus the result of the idealization of a specific division between religion and politics, state and church.



<b>DENMARK</b>		<i>Table 1</i>
Separation between what?	Politics and religion is separated, especially protection of politics from religion. The strongest (loaded) concept is “religion” which is attributed dangerous and powerful qualities.	
What is regulated?	Religiously founded institutions and demands in the political and societal life	
Where is the line drawn?	The boundary is drawn at the home and the church/ mosque’s walls: religion should not have (weight/ clout) outside. Theocracy and sharia are pictured and presented as the opposite.	
What is regulated by whom?	The people legislate – and surveil locally	

Table1 is a translated part of the table by Wæver (2011: 180) where Denmark alongside the other three analysed case countries is being reviewed in accordance with illustration 1. Here, I have chosen only to include the perspectives on Denmark, as I am not looking into the comparative perspectives of secularism.

This demonstrates the general Danish secularism, thus an overall framework for religion’s role in society, while I in the analysis will examine more specific discourses related to gender equality and see how religion/ secularism is framed in relation to and as part of this specific concept (MFA III 2018).

The conclusions from Wæver’s analysis is that in Denmark the important separation is not between state and church, but between religion and politics. One of the reasons for this is the fact that there is an Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, the official Church of Denmark, is mostly funded by Church tax, that is governmentally organised (Bibelselskabet 2019; The Danish Ministry of Taxation 2019). This constellation exists alongside the ideology of secularism in Denmark, and helps highlighting secularism as an ideology that can exist even

within the political statecraft that legitimises a church of the state (Wæver 2011a:181).

In the analysis of how secularism takes form in the Danish organisation of religion, the strongest concept is religion, which can be seen as entailing **dangerous and powerful qualities** (Wæver 2011a:180). Religion is thus essentialised and given specific 'dangerous attributes'. While Wæver argues that the fear of religion is an important aspect of secularism, this fear can be further framed as a threat. When this happens, then it is what Wæver refers to as securitization.

Securitization is when an issue is presented as an existential threat, which allows for extraordinary measures (Wæver 2008:210; Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde 1998). It basically means, that when a political issue is framed as a security threat, the discursive way in which it is framed gives way to more extreme means to solve or counter the problem. This can be means as military intervention, discriminatory laws etc. The Danish secularism thus entails this perception of religion as dangerous, since religion as an abstract thing is framed as dangerous. It is the discourse surrounding religion or constructed about it by others, that securitizes a religion and what it entails, e.g. Islam in some parts of the debate in Denmark, where Islam is constructed as dangerous and with qualities to threaten Danish secular values that are seen as Danish and maybe even Christian values (Jacobsen 2017). And this is where it becomes political and used as a secularist ideology, though it is also possible to discuss whether it is in fact secular in its roots.

Another aspect of Danish secularism as Wæver points out is that **religious institutions and demands are to be limited or completely be kept out of the political and public life** (Wæver, 2011a: 180). This reflects what was described earlier regarding the discussion on pork meat in Danish kindergartens (The Guardian 2016). The argument here is that religious demands should not be met in public. In continuation of this, religion should have no influence outside of the private or religious edifices (Wæver 2011a:180). The protestant understanding that is inherent to secularism is thus apparent here, where religion is seen as strictly private and religion cannot be used as an argument to demand certain

rights from the state. Here, religious belief set in the private is accepted, but religious practice in public is controlled (Mahmood 2016:6)

The final aspect of Danish secularism as stated by Wæver, is that the **people legislate and monitor locally** (Wæver 2011a:180). This I understand to the regard that e.g. municipalities locally decide whether they want to offer e.g. gender segregated opportunities in the public swimming pools, kindergartens decide locally what menu they offer their children, and the board of the cooperative apartments decides whether the cooperative should utilize its funds to buy a Christmas tree or not (Sæhl 2012). This aspect of Danish secularism will not be utilized in the analysis, since it is related to Danish national legislation.

These are the characteristics of Danish secularism according to Wæver. What he further argues is that due to a restrictive immigrant policy, the Danish national identity was shattered and the earlier picture of Danes as inclusive and openminded could no longer live alongside this restrictive attitude towards immigrants, thus the discourse and the construction of the Danish national identity had to change and reconstruct (Wæver 2008:224). *"Dialectically, this tension has been resolved by metonymically redefining liberal and enlightenment values as expressed liberal and enlightenment values as expressed in two areas: gender equality and secularism."* (Wæver 2008:224). **Gender equality and secularism** comes to represent liberal values. They are thus being given a special place and are seen as essential Danish values that need to be protected. Furthermore, other liberal values have been down played and seen as less relevant (ibid.). An example of this is how new immigrants can now be offered a course in gender equality called 'Ret til ligestilling' (The Right to Gender Equality) (MFA VI 2018). The opening line of the course material is: *"In Denmark, women and men have the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities - they have "Gender equality"!"* (DRC 2018).. This, I find emphasises how gender equality is portrayed as something that all Danes holds.

### **3.1.3.1 Summarizing Danish Secularism**

According to Wæver, the Danish secularism is strong in its view on religion, as not only to be held in the personal sphere, but also that it presents a danger to the Danish society and the Danish national identity.

While Wæver sees secularism and gender equality as pivotal discourses in the construction of Danish national identity, he does not go further into how ideas of gender equality are secularised and what characterises the discourses of gender equality that have a secular world view. Danish national identity build around secularism and gender equality being 'essential' values of the Dane (Wæver 2008:217–220). Therefore, in Denmark, gender equality is perhaps even more so than in other versions of secularism discursively tied to a secular version of gender equality in order to be 'legitimate'. One could therefore expect the values interwoven in the discourses on gender equality in the development policy to be secular. What secular ideals of gender equality means can perhaps be understood through the concept of secular feminism, which is why I am now proceeding to the concepts of secular feminism and religious feminism.

## **3.2 Feminisms in Development Discourses**

I am introducing the concepts of secular and religious feminism in order to shine a light on the difference between different modes of feminism and to demonstrate how the idea of gender equality expressed in the Danish development policy can be understood as a result of specific ideologies, thus giving a framework along the lines of those of Wæver and Casanova.

One could ask whether feminism and gender equality is the same. I would say that it is not, but that feminism is the premise for gender equality. Feminism is a critical theory that does not simply reflects on what is, but also what is desirable (Salgado and Patricia 2016). It takes multiple forms and therefore it is possible to talk of different schools or branches of feminisms that tend to be the ideologies behind arguments of gender equality.

### 3.2.1 Secular Feminisms

Saba Mahmood suggest that the relation between feminism and religion has been somewhat strained (Mahmood 2005:x-2). Feminist theory has in some forms embraced issues of difference regarding class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality and more, while it has explored religious differences to a very limited degree (Mahmood 2005: 2). A relationship, that is perhaps most classified by critique or scepticism towards religion and religious institutions, seeing these institutions as dominated by men, patriarchal in their structure, and where western feminism is perhaps grounded in the secular ideals of personal freedom understanding 'religion' as patriarchal and controlling over women's lives (Mahmood 2005:ix-1).

As Mahmood describes, the issue with secular feminism is that it represents a certain epistemology, a certain way of understanding the world, in this case the world of gender roles and gender issues. Mahmood writes more generally about how she herself has experienced the difficulty understanding religion's role in other's lives, because she herself comes from a secular-leftist foundation (Mahmood, 2005:x-xii). She notes, that the secular perspective encompasses a fear of the religious that is not confined to the private while the *"...fear is accompanied by a deep self-assurance about the truth of the progressive-secular imaginary, one that assumes that the life forms it offers are the best way out for these unenlightened souls, mired as they are in the spectral hopes that gods and prophets hold out to them."* (Mahmood, 2005: xi).

If the Danish development policy were to view the world through these lenses only, that represents a certain secular feminism or understanding of gender equality, looking in particular at the gender perspective, it could impact as a spatial blindness, where the religious connections and answers to given problems are not viewed, resulting in misinterpretation of the 'bigger picture' (Oshry 2007). The fear of religion, as described by Wæver, is coherent with the outcomes Mahmood describes of the issues with secular feminism, leading to a blindness, also understood as a relationship blindness (ibid.), having an intrinsic idea of religiously influenced individuals and decisions as being lesser than

those of secular individuals and their decision making processes (Wæver 2011a:180; Mahmood 2005:xi-2).

While this section refers to a theoretical approach within feminist studies and feminist groups and individuals, I still find that it entails discourses that transpire the academic sphere and the ideological presuppositions or framework that at the core of secular feminisms are relevant to discourses outside of academia. Within academia secular feminism is a concept that covers a heterogeneous group of feminists. Here, secular feminism is presented to describe what the overarching commonalities and the defining aspects of secular feminist discourses entail.

Secular feminism can be framed as feminist movements and feminists that do not refer to religious or spiritual sources, but to humanist, liberal and socialist ideologies when framing their feminist arguments (van den Brandt 2014:36). It is thus the values functioning as the foundation for the feminist arguments that determine whether it can be categorised as secular or not. Van der Brandt finds that these values are that of **humanist, liberal and socialist ideologies**, which are quite broad categories, that lay the ideological foundation for secular feminist perspectives (van den Brandt 2014:38). Perhaps van den Brandt's depiction is mostly defined by the *not* religiously founded distinction of secular feminism. Ahmed-Ghosh is more specific in her definition of secular feminists, writing that they "*base their rationale for women's rights on a human rights discourse to enable and empower the individual in a secular democracy to create a civil society.*" (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008:106). The guidelines for this secular feminism thus lie in the declaration of human rights and the argumentation for women's rights is found here, rather than in religious texts or reasonings. Secular feminisms are not just secularism promoted by feminists, but have other elements. Furthermore, according to Ahmed-Ghosh, secular feminism views religion as an oppressive state institution (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008:113). She also finds that there are three main ideologies that secular feminist writing is rooted

in; **western, socialist and human rights**, whilst often being overlapping discourses.

In relation to the Danish secularism, as described previously in section 3.1.2, secular feminism can entail aspects that are not characterised within the ideology of secularism as determined in 3.1.2. including socialist and humanist discourses, while the liberal and western are interlinked with secularism according to the previous description of secularism (Wæver 2011a:180). The aspect of human rights is one that is not only evident in versions of secular feminism, but also in development policy in general. The human rights framework has been discussed within the development literature in relation to whether it is a reflection of a western value system (Tomalin 2007:16). In relation to the aspects of religion, scholars have suggested both that religion can be a barrier to human rights, and that the human rights regime can lack religious perspectives (ibid.). The secular feminist approach incorporating the human rights as its value base therefore may not be able to relate to religious perspectives on gender equality and the discourse may seem alien or *ungodly* to religious individuals. Furthermore, the human rights based approaches are limited “...because they fail to acknowledge the ways in which different religious-cultural traditions shape ethics.” (Tomalin 2006:94).

One aspect of this is the lack of acknowledgement of duties and collective responsibility as opposed to individual rights (Tomalin 2006:94). Gender equality is an ethical question and therefore falls under the category of the social ethics. The secular feminisms that have human rights as their value base therefore risk the same and reach the same limitations (Tomalin 2007:20). As Tomalin states: “... a greater sensitivity towards the potential for values like rights within different cultural traditions would benefit the development process. There are many studies which suggest that the articulation of rights as secular, universal values fails to resonate with the worldviews that shape social ethics in many non-western contexts...” (Tomalin, 2007: 17) She thereby implies that the articulation, or the discourse, of the human rights might make them less utile in development strategies if they are understood as secular and, to some extent also Western, which can be non-relatable in certain cultural and religious communities and contexts (ibid.).

In alignment other secular feminists see; “...[s]ecular democracy ...as the prerequisite for demands of individual rights based on a system of fairness and justice, thus ensuring women a vehicle to claim those rights.” (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 106) and that there is a fear of the theocratic state (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 113). Secular societies exist in many different forms, but the idea of secular democracy as the separation of religion and politics where religious actors have no power in the political system is what Ahmed-Ghosh refers to here (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008:106). The fear of a theocratic – or as the discourse in many European states is focussing: an Islamic – state that oppresses women stands in opposition to the secular democratic state, based on rights and private freedom. The democratic state with religious influence is thus unthinkable. Furthermore, secular feminism can entail what Tomalin describes as a general obsession in the West with Islam, where Muslim women are stereotyped and depicted as victims of a patriarchal belief system (Tomalin 2011:3).

Finally, I want to mention that some in their critique of secular feminism conflate it with western feminism, which can be problematic when it is understood as equal to Western cultural values that stand in opposition to e.g. Islamic cultural values (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2008:101-102). Secular feminism is critiqued for lacking cultural relevance and can be problematic in development contexts if it is associated with ‘the West’, in a context where ‘the West’ is received negatively (Tomalin, 2011: 4). In Ahmed-Ghosh’s vision, secular feminism should not impose western ideals and values, but be “...cognizant of constructing a culturally and politically appropriate setting, without imposing western ideals and values.” (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 107)

A perspective that I would like to include in the aspects of secular feminism is what Mahmood writes, that it is not her intention to “...question the profound transformation that the liberal discourse of freedom and individual autonomy has enabled in women’s lives around the world, but rather to draw attention to the ways in which these liberal presuppositions have become naturalized in the scholarship on gender.” (Mahmood, 2005: 13) This perspective is why I am drawing in the theories of secular feminism and religious feminism, to show how



ideas of gender equality can be understood from a perspective of certain worldviews that are not universal in their character, but are articulated as if they were.

As demonstrated, there are different versions of secular feminisms that spring from different ideologies or values, which will be investigated in regards to the discourses on gender equality in the Danish development cooperation. I will combine the notions from secular feminisms with the specifics of Danish secularism to see which values underline the discourses on gender equality and religion in Danish development cooperation.

While secular feminists see religion as patriarchal and find their arguments for gender equality in secular arguments I want to mention the feminist discourses that find their arguments in religious texts; religious feminisms.

### 3.2.2 Religious Feminisms

Where secular feminists reject “... *religion for its inherent patriarchy...*” (Tomalin, 2011: 37) religious feminist re-interpret religious systems in consistence with what they consider core religious values in the selected religion, and in feminist thinking (Tomalin, 2011: 37). Religious feminism may be, but does not have to be, in opposition to secular, western ideas of feminism (Tomalin, 2011: 37).

Most research related to gender, religion, and development concerns itself with Islam (Tomalin, 2011: 3) and I am therefore also bringing in the concept of Islamic feminism as an example of religious feminism. According to Ahmed-Ghosh Islamic Feminism is in its manifestations heterogeneous and there are many different Islamic feminists that interpret the Quran differently, but what is common for them is the use of the Quran and other holy texts to argue for women’s rights (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2008: 105-106).

It is important to distinguish different forms of religious feminism from religious fundamentalism that support violence and actions that limit women’s freedom in various areas of life (Tomalin 2007: 21) whereas religious feminism promotes

gender equality. It can be in a form that promotes equality between women and men, another variation is the equity discourse, where the religious tradition is seen as supporting gender equity rather than equality, meaning that women and men have the same value and are equal, yet different, therefore women have different roles to men and must perform different tasks and take on other responsibilities than their male counterparts (Tomalin, 2007: 21). This idea of equity or 'equal but different' can be seen as "dangerous" from a secular perspective, because there is a fear that this argumentation can be used to justify oppression and subordination (Tomalin, 2007: 21).

The critique of Western (secular) perspectives is therefore also that they see oppression in e.g. veiling, while Islamic (religious) feminists argue for it, sparking the relationship blindness previously described. (Oshry 2007; Tomalin 2007:22) A position of religious feminism is held by Peach who critiques the tendency to see religion as fixed and for only seeing the religious traditions that have legitimised oppression and not seeing the potential for them also to include recourses that can be liberating and empowering (Peach 2000:72). In her version of religious feminism, the religious dimension presents an alternative that *"...takes seriously how women's own sense of moral identity may be reshaped by religious gender ideology."* (Peach, 2000: 72) This approach where liberating and empowering dimensions of religion allows for people to maintain their religious identity while accepting the self that is based on the human rights frame work (Peach, 200: 73-74). Ahmed-Ghosh proposes something similar in what she names hybrid feminism. Hybridizing Islamic, secular and others discourses to better understand the lived lives of women and suggests that e.g. Muslim women's lives are heterogeneous and as such do not fit into mainstream feminisms and the typical feminist compartments (2008: 99). Rather, she proposes the collaboration of Islamic and secular feminists, thus not solely relying on a religious feminism, but a hybrid as she names it, trying to break down the relationship blindness in order to see the bigger picture (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008:99; Oshry 2007).

## 4. Analysis

The analysis will aim to show how religions or religious perspectives are framed in relation to gender equality in the development policy generally and more specifically in relation to the discourses surrounding freedom of religion and belief and gender equality. Furthermore, it seeks to investigate if gender equality is framed in a certain way that can be understood from the perspectives of secular feminisms.

### 4.1 Women's and girls' rights as gender equality

Before moving into the analysis as such, I want to draw the attention to the fact that men and boys are only mentioned one time in the The World 2030, one time in the political priorities for 2018 and two times in the political priorities for 2019 with more or less the same wording as in 2018, referring to women's ability to participate on equal footing with men. In the political priorities from the government 2019 the mentioning is either related to human rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights or economic development (MFA, 2018: 9) and in the strategy and the priorities 2018 in more general wording (MFA, 2017: 8).

One of the places that boys and men are mentioned states the following:

*"Girls and women are prevented from participating on an equal footing with boys and men in far too many places in the world. This is not only unjust, it is also holding societies back." (Danida, 2017: 35)*

The idea of gender equality is thus framed in a way that focuses on the structural disadvantages for women and girls, while not including the normative aspects of why that is so and thus not looking into aspects of gender roles or the role of men in securing women's equal opportunities.

Whether this focus is a result of the Sustainable Development Goal 5, regarding gender equality and women's and girls' rights I will not elaborate further on this

in the thesis, but draw to the attention of the reader, that the discourse on gender equality in the empirical material of this thesis is focused solely on women and girls. When I am writing about gender equality I am therefore talking of this discourse since it is the way gender equality is represented. However, I am not looking to do an analysis of the way in which gender equality is portrayed in relation to binary gender understandings or focus on specific genders, but rather the discourse on 'religion's' role in achieving gender equality and thus the religious or secular aspects behind the discursive presentation of gender equality.

## 4.2 Representations of 'Religion'

In the following I will first describe how religion is being framed in relation to gender equality in the official policies from the MFA and the government Lars Løkke Rasmussen III; the development strategy *The World 2030* and the government's policies for 2018 and 2019, and in the following chapter move onto the empirical material concerning gender equality in relation to the MFA work with Freedom of Religions and Belief.

Religion is mentioned in four separate paragraphs throughout *The World 2030* of which *one* refers to gender equality. This can be compared to the 11 sections where gender equality is mentioned throughout the strategy – apart from the paragraph concerning this thematic area in the strategy. In the 2018 Priority Paper, religion is nowhere mentioned and in the 2019 Priority Paper it is mentioned once, which will be further examined later in the analysis. While religion is hardly mentioned in the official documents it does not mean that religion is not taken into consideration in some of the NGO's and especially FBO's that implement the strategy, but rather speaks to the discursive attitude towards religion. As Thomsen (Appendix A 2018: 8) points out, the strategy is the frame for Danish development actors to apply for projects, funded by the Danish state, within and the discursive focus both functions as a positioning within the international political arena, but also ultimately determines in which projects money is to be spend, which the priority papers further specify.

Of the few times that religion *is* mentioned in relation to gender equality, what are the perspectives on religious aspects of achieving gender equality then? Below I will analyse the two paragraphs mentioning the perspectives in relation to secularism and Danish secularism.

*“Denmark recognises the role played by religious leaders and faith-based organisations in the development of many societies, including in relation to promoting dialogue, peace and reconciliation. This also applies to the possibility of addressing value-related, religious challenges, for instance related to gender equality.”* (MFA and Danida 2017: 13)

In this quote from *The World 2030* it is the concrete role of FBO’s and religious leaders and their role in relation to combating issues related to religious challenges, such as gender equality and their role in society at large that is brought forward.

It is thus a positive representation of the FBO’s and faith leaders. This stands in contrast to the way Wæver describes the aspect of Danish secularism regarding religious institutions in the Danish society, where religious institutions and religious demands are to be kept out of public life and their roles are to be limited (Wæver 2011:180). Although this quote does not directly mention religious institutions, religious leaders must be said to represent the religious institutions and thus this positive presentation of religious actors differs from the national secularism that Wæver describes (*ibid.*). While religious actors are presented positively, it is still a quite pessimistic understanding of religion itself in relation to gender equality. The idea to limit religious actors in public life that is visible in Wæver’s interpretation of Danish secularism is thus not as visible here.

The second part of the quote states: *“This also applies to the possibility of addressing value-related, religious challenges, for instance related to gender equality.”* (Danida, 2017: 13)

Within this part, it is implied that religious values present 'obstacles' to what is perceived as gender equality. However, there is no mentioning of the ability religious actors encompass to bring out the aspects of gender equality inherent in religious texts, as would be proposed by religious feminists (Tomalin 2011: 37).

While there is a positive framing of religious actors as possible agents of change in the first part of the paragraph, the latter still frames gender equality as something that needs to be obtained within a religious community despite of the religion. While this might very well be true in certain religious communities, it is also a generalising view. This view does not problematize value-related issue within *religious communities or institutions*, but rather problematize *religion* as if it were a thing entailing universal characteristics (Mahmood 2016: 3)

It is as assumed that it is embedded in religion rather than it being the interpretations of religious texts that are problematic in relation to gender equality. There is thus a subtle insinuation that religions entail perspectives on gender equality in themselves.

This approach overlooks the aspects that religion does not present any truths in itself, but rather that all religions are a result of interpretations of the religious texts – and religious texts can be a positive force for gender equality instead of an obstacle (Tomalin 201: 37) As my interviewee, Mr Thomsen mentions (Thomsen 2017:3), this is however still a big step in relation to how religion has been seen overall in Danish development policy and in particular a big step regarding gender equality.

Next, in the only quotation from the 2019 Priority Paper mentioning religion, religious barriers are presented as inhibiting women from participating in economic life. Religion, in relation to gender equality, is framed and understood as a barrier to women's freedom and possibilities (MFA, 2018: 9). This distinction of religion as a barrier towards gender equality is equivalent to the way the newer constructed Danish liberal and enlightenment values are being stressed, as mentioned by Wæver: in the expressed values of secularism and gender equality (Wæver 2008: 224).

*"More than 100 countries have legislation limiting the right of women to participate in economic life – combined with a web of cultural, religious and social barriers to the freedom and opportunity of girls and women. These limits and barriers infringe on the rights of the individual and impede social and economic development."* (MFA, 2018: 9)

Here, religion is woven together with cultural and social barriers, while still represented as a negative to women and girls' lives. It is also stated without a differentiation between different religions, but as religious barriers as a general. Religion is given little attention since its only mention is here, alongside cultural and social barriers. It is therefore possible to conclude, that religion is understood as entailing barriers towards gender equality such as culture and social norms alike. Religion is formulated as presenting an obstacle to *"...the rights of the individual and ... social and economic development."* (MFA, 2018: 9). This narrates and shows how the Danish Minister and the ministry views religion and what they find it to be in contrast to. I will return to the perspective of the individual and rights later.

#### **4.2.1 Partial Conclusion**

With the above examination of the two paragraphs in mind, I can conclude that there is very little focus on religion in relation to gender equality in the official documents on the Danish development strategy. The absence of religion in the official documents speaks to the prioritization of religion in general in the Danish development cooperation and aid work.

Furthermore, I found no signs of arguments regarding the religious ethics to promote gender equality. Religion is thus neither used to justify why gender equality is important nor is it presented as a special Christian imperative to secure gender equality. It is rather presented in an ambiguous way where religious actors are presented as important in promoting gender equality that differs from the Danish secularism that does not wish to see interference from religious actors. At the same time a more 'sceptical' relation towards religion,

with religion being presented in a somewhat essentialist way is present that shows signs of a secularist understanding of religion as ‘thing’ and one that has negative implications on gender equality.

As mentioned in methodology section 2.4, the MFA unit Freedom of Religion and Belief was established in 2018. The unit works to promote and maintain freedom of religion and belief and was ‘given’ the normative focus of gender equality (MFA III 2018). One could perhaps expect another discourse where religion is presented in another way in relation to gender equality, one that rather identifies how freedom of religion and belief and gender equality are complimentary, as religions’ relation to gender equality might be more complex and nuanced.

### 4.3 Nuanced discourses regarding religions

In the following I refer to the four pieces of empirical material related to freedom of religion and belief: two articles, where of one (*Nadias kamp for frihed er vores fælles kamp*) is written by Minister of Development Cooperation (Tørnæs 2018b), Ms Ulla Tørnæs, the other (*Nu skal religionsfrihed kobles til køn*) is an interview with her (Lyng 2018), a video that is produced by the largest party in the Government, Venstre (The Liberal Party of Denmark) (Venstre, 2018) and the manuscript for the speech given at the second Contact Forum by the Minister (Tørnæs, 2018a). All of these above mentioned materials are related to freedom of religion and belief and gender equality.

First, I will continue to look at the overall framing of religion in relation to gender equality and afterwards see how freedom of religion and belief is connected to gender equality.

A similar description to what was found in the 2019 policy paper can be detected in (*Nu skal religionsfrihed kobles til køn*), whereas the economic possibilities were seen as being restricted by religious barriers in the formulation in the policy paper, here the Minister elaborates on honour related



violence and denial of political participation, being closely connected to religion and culture:

*“In many areas there is a close connection between culture, religion and the forms of oppression that women are subjected to, as for example honour related violence and that women are denied political participation.”* (Lyng, 2018 n.p., my translation)

Opposed to the description of religious barriers in the policy paper, Ms. Tørnæs here states religion as a universal homogenous entity. As written in the theoretical chapter, secularism creates an illusion that there is such a thing as religion and that it has an essence (Casanova 2009, 1051; Mahmood 2016: 3). Were Ms. Tørnæs to have used the words cultures and religions it could have been read as social constructions, thus a more contextual articulation of what religion is, and one where religions are understood as mirrors of the social context they emerge from and adapt to (Jushka, 2011: ix). The formulation by the Minister implies a secularist ideology in its essentialist attribution of ‘religion’ as connected to oppressive practices, thus implicitly implying that there are such a ‘thing as religion’, potentially functioning as the reason for oppressive practices, rather than human interpretations of specific religious texts. There also seems to be a conflating of fundamentalist interpretations of religion with ‘religion’ in terms of the patriarchal nature that is being assigned to most religions. The secular feminism that is visible in the empirical material could be nuanced by drawing on religious feminist’s aspects, where the secular understanding of the rights through the human right’s scheme is used critically towards the fundamental versions of religion, instead of a broader essentialising of ‘religion’ as dangerous to women (Tomalin, 2007: 8). Seeing that the secularist suspicion towards religion when it comes to gender equality overlooks the heterogeneous ways in which religions are interpreted and thus how religious women’s lives are multifaceted and can be informed by “...religious gender ideology” (Peach, 2000: 72) the religious feminist approach, finding arguments supporting gender equality and religious interpretations of rights offers an alternative to the secular view on religions as patriarchal

(Tomalin, 2007: 17). If this is what Tørnæs in fact implies (see 4.4.) when she articulates the necessity for Freedom of Religion and Belief for women it needs to be reformulated in a way that explicitly refers to religious women's reasoning related to religious texts and religions as social constructs that do not exist as patriarchal or oppressive to women outside of human interpretation and therefore also hold the 'power' to be interpreted in ways that support gender equality, although perhaps not necessarily in the 'version' that is universalised in the human rights scheme. In the following citation, religion is also described in relation to gender equality, this time referred to in plural form.

#### **4.3.1 The Fundamentalist Patriarchal "Religion"**

In the written words from the speech given at the 2nd Contact Forum by Minister Tørnæs, it is stated that most religions are patriarchal and male interpretations dominate and legitimize marginalising and discriminating practices towards women.

*"Not only are most religions patriarchal. They are also often dominated by male interpretations that are still being used to legitimize practices, which marginalize or discriminate against girls and women." (Tørnæs 2018a)*

Here there is a differentiation of religions, rather than referring to religion in an essentialist manner which we have seen a tendency to do. Here religions are in plural, although shortly after followed with the claim that most religions are patriarchal. This articulation thus does not represent a secularist idea of religion as we saw above. What is instead noticeable is the idea that religions are patriarchal. The secular feminisms that were described in section 3.2.2 holds this perspective of religion as patriarchal and dominated by men (Mahmood, 2005: x - 2). This tells us that the rhetoric visible regarding religions as patriarchal in the speech holds the ideology that can be described as secular feminism.

Religions as patriarchal is mentioned again in the speech, but here it is as a reason to why states must intervene.

*“Because most religions are patriarchal, states have a special obligation to ensure that women have an equal voice and influence on questions of the impact of religion on society and on legislation. This is especially important when it comes to family law, where religion often plays a key role.”* (no author, speech, 2018)

This presents an understanding of states as non-patriarchal and at the same time male dominated. It is almost as if it is implied that if women are included religion will be given less influence. Here there is again the essentialistic view on religion as *producing “...certain particular and predictable effects...”* (Casanova, 2009: 1051-1052) and is perhaps not to be kept out of politics, but if interpreted by men it will be damaging for women. This is an interesting view that I feel overlooks the fact that many women do not support gender equality, whether they are religious or not. Including women in politics is an aim in itself in relation to equal representation as an aspect of gender equality, but it does not guarantee that those women will support changes in an e.g. family law that only allows the man to file for divorce. As I described before beginning the analysis gender equality here is focused on women and girls’ rights. This discourse essentialises women, making women into a homogeneous group that in this case are oppressed by ‘religion’ and need to be offered ‘personal freedom’ within religion in the form of freedom of religion and belief as I will illustrate in the next chapter. Furthermore, it assumes that women will be supportive of initiatives supporting secular visions of ‘gender equality’ if they have the opportunity to be so.

#### **4.3.2 Partial conclusion**

As one could assume religion is more visible in the empirical material regarding freedom of religion and belief also in a broader sense than merely as a referral to freedom of religion and belief. The discourses regarding religion and gender equality here present a more nuanced perception that does not only essentialise religion, but that draws in the more contextualising formulation of religions, while still presenting religions as a ‘danger’ to women as most religions are seen as ‘essentially’ patriarchal, thus portraying a secular feminist understanding of

religions. The perception that women are thus oppressed by the patriarchal religions is portrayed as women are a homogenous group that are supporters of specific secular versions of gender equality.

When gender equality is framed in relation to freedom of religion and belief it seems to be a slightly different picture, which I will elaborate in the following.

#### **4.4 Freedom of religion and belief sets religious women free**

The assumption, that I first mentioned in the introduction to the analysis, that freedom of religion and belief and gender equality would be framed as complimentary is found in the following quote.

Minister Ms. Ulla Tørnæs argues that it is “... *crucial to fight for freedom of religion and belief and women’s rights being complimentary to each other. So women can decide for themselves what their belief or view on life should mean for the everyday life, their role in society and the right to decide over their own bodies.*” (Tørnæs 2018b)

Article 18 in the Human Rights Declaration, which is what is traditionally referred to when freedom of religion and belief is mentioned has the following wording:

*“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”* (UN 2015)

Article 18 in the Declaration does not seem to mention anything about personal choice in relation to how one as an individual want to interpret the religion one adheres to. Rather it is about freedom to choose, change religion and to practice that religion freely. I find that the interpretation of this from Ms. Tørnæs goes a

little beyond what can be found in the declaration. In her interpretation, freedom of religion and belief almost comes to entail a personal interpretation of one's religion, which I not sure can be deducted from Article 18. This seem instead to reflect a secularist understanding of religion as a personal choice, which is rooted in the Protestant Christian idea of religion as a set of beliefs accepted by the individual that can also be dismissed by the individual (Mahmood 2009:843).

Implicitly also taking the interpretation of religious texts to an individual level and suggesting that religious institutions or arguments should not hold 'power' over the individual woman. This perspective can be seen as corresponding with the aspect of Danish secularism that wishes to limit the religious institutions in public life (Wæver 2011a:180) and as entailing a secular feminist perspective that religion is controlling women's lives (Mahmood 2005:xi). Freedom of religion and belief is thus framed as positive for women's freedom while religious women are understood as oppressed if they do not have the opportunity to choose which aspects of a given religion they want to 'accept' in order to live what is then interpreted as a free life. It assumes what Mahmood questions: that "*...secular forms of life and secularism's progressive formulations exhaust ways of living meaningfully and richly in this world.*" (Mahmood, 2005: xi). That female religious lives can only be meaningful if they are religious in a 'secular manner = a protestant manner' where religious belief is an individualized belief. In other forms religion is a force "*...that threatens to subject us to a normative morality dictated by mullahs and priests.*" (Mahmood, 2005: xi) Here this normative morality is given the character of 'dangerous' to women's life choices. Freedom of religion and belief in the way that Tørnæs presents it is thus crucial to women, because women are the ones being oppressed by 'religion' and religious actors. With religions being patriarchal and 'run by men'.

In the final statement in the written words for the speech it is stressed how The Church of Denmark, The Evangelical Lutheran Church, was the among the first Christian communities to ordain female priests and that today there are more female priests than male (Tørnæs 2018a). Here the "gender equality" of the Christian church in Denmark is brought forward as an example, one might say, of

how a religion does not represent a danger to women, rather is it portrayed as a manifestation of a religion that is practiced in a 'gender equal' manner. The Danish 'version of protestant Christianity' is thus not critiqued, but rather shown as an example to follow. This is not the only place the Christianity is brought forward.

#### 4.4.1 Christians prioritized

In the video produced by The Liberal Party of Denmark shared on social media (Venstre 2018), the Minister recorded before leaving for the first ministerial to advance religious freedom hosted by the U.S. (US State 2018). Christianity is mentioned as the only religious example of persecutions on the basis of religion. It is conspicuous that Tørnæs only mentions persecutions of Christians (Tørnæs 2018b), as if implying that it is only Christian minorities that experience persecution, and that it is only this religious group that the Danish state needs to "protect" (Venstre 2018).

In an article that Tørnæs has authored after the international ministerial she also focuses on the Christian minorities, while here mentioning that persecutions against freedom of religion and belief happens to all religious minorities (Tørnæs 2018b):

*"Research points to 1 in 12 Christian experience persecution. In 2017 more than 3000 Christians were killed and 15.000 Christian buildings attacked. But attacks on freedom of religion and belief happen to all religions and societies of belief. Animists, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Atheists and Humanist amongst others, are all victims of aggression and oppression." (Tørnæs 2018b, my translation)*

While this quote demonstrates that the focus is not solely on Christian minorities, both in the video and the article the same numbers of Christians being killed appear while no numbers or estimations of Muslims, Buddhists or other religious groups are mentioned. Furthermore, Ms. Tørnæs writes how she talked to two of the victims of religious persecution and writes *"I therefore asked*

*the two Christian victims...*" (Tørnæs, 2018b, my translation). The need to mention that they were Christian seems unnecessary and as a clear emphasis on their religious affiliation.

Although this focus on religious affiliation is not directly connected to the gender perspective of the discourse I still want to draw forward how the focus on Christianity somehow reflects a nationalistic discourse where it is implicitly implied that "we" Danish are Christian, a Christian country and therefore our focus should be on the Christians.

When this perspective is attached to her argument of bringing freedom of religion and belief closer to women's rights one comes to think if she is talking of Christian women being oppressed by Christianity? It does not seem to be the case, rather she is talking of how Nadia was tortured by ISIS and Christians need to be protected, so that Christians can experience freedom of religion and belief. What becomes interesting is that her references to women who "need" freedom of religion and belief are related to Muslim practices, e.g. female gender mutilation. The Christian women need to be protected from 'outsiders', other religions or groups persecuting the religious minority. For the Christian women it is thus not Christianity itself that is presented as the threat, rather the threat comes from being Christian.

There is thus talk of two different kinds of freedom of religion and belief. One that is connected to being persecuted by other religions, states or groups, which are not the Christian religions in this discourse, and the other is the women who are to be protected from 'religion'. The way that freedom of religion and belief was connected to women's rights in the section *Freedom of religion and belief sets religious women free* implies that the women who need freedom of religion and belief from their religions are religions that have another structure than the Protestant Christian, implicitly saying that protestant Christian women already experience this individual freedom of religion and belief and that Protestant Christianity is not included in the 'most religions' that are patriarchal and interpreted by men.

When religion, apart from Protestant Christianity, is critiqued as 'dangerous' to women, how come freedom of religion and belief on the individual level is important to support, other than the reasons given above. One explanation could be that freedom of religion and belief is declared a human right in the Human Rights Declaration. In the following I will look at how human rights are used as moral/ ethical foundation for promoting a specific vision of gender equality.

#### **4.4.2 Partial Conclusion**

In the above we have seen how freedom of religion and belief and gender equality in the form of women's rights has been discursively matched and freedom of religion and belief is stated as important in allowing women to experience personal freedom. Religion is understood from the perspective of Protestantism as a personal choice and freedom of religion and belief allows women to experience free choice within the patriarchal and oppressive religions to which they belong. The perspective of religion as dangerous in Danish secularism is specified as dangerous to women. There is an implicit differentiation between freedom of religion and belief for Christians (women) and women of other beliefs, suggesting that the Christian women are in danger of religious persecution and therefore need freedom of religion to not experience discrimination or persecution from other religions, while women belonging to the patriarchal religions need freedom of religion and belief to be 'protected' from their own religions, allowing them to experience the personal freedom to interpret their religions that protestant women already have.

#### **4.5 Emphasis on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

First, I want to describe how achieving equality between women and men is expressed as being reliant on women obtaining specific rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights. As stated in the beginning of the analysis, there is a sole focus on women and girls in the development policy on gender equality, and across the documents gender equality is especially promoted in one specific area, that of sexual and reproductive rights and health (SHRH) seen as a Danish



core value<sup>5</sup>. SHRH is widely understood as the right to contraception, abortion, family planning, to be free from sexual violence or female gender mutilation (WHO 2015).

*“We place sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls at the centre of our work...” (MFA and Danida 2017:6)*

As the above quote states, at the heart of the Danish development strategy related to gender equality lies the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights, which Denmark for a long time has advocated for globally (MFA and Danida 2017:35) Throughout the strategy, SHRH is formulated as the most important cause for Denmark and in both priority papers the funding for SRHR is being emphasised as the highest amount ever to be appropriated in the Finance Act to SHRH through multilateral initiatives (MFA and Danida 2017:16; MFA I 2018:4).

In the discourse on freedom religion and belief SHRH is also mentioned as something that Freedom of Religion and Belief can ensure for women, allowing them to make individual choices, as discussed in 4.4.1, thus here specifying that Freedom of Religion and Belief is also viewed as enabling women to obtain sexual and reproductive rights, thus implying that it is otherwise limited by her religion, if the religion does not allow for this individual or personal interpretation.

*“In connection with sexual and reproductive health and rights, Freedom of Religion or Belief gives women additional protection by allowing each women to choose freely, without force, to what extent she believes her religion or belief should influence her sexual and reproductive health opportunities and choices.” (Tørnæs, 2018a)*

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<sup>5</sup> There are other initiatives in relation to gender equality that are mentioned in The World 2030, but they are not given the same emphasis in neither volume nor in rhetoric.

It is almost as if the religious woman is portrayed as having no choice within the religion she is practising when it comes to SHRH. As discussed earlier, there is an articulation of a profound need for interpretation of Freedom of Religion and Belief as entailing individual interpretation of religion in order to be able to obtain SHRH and thus subsequently gender equality.

This focus on SHRH is quite controversial with many other focal areas that could have been chosen, such as education, securing women's participation in politics, securing financial empowerment of women or other marginalised subjects or groups etc. Finally, there is also the possibility of focusing on men's ideas of masculinity. This I mention, to emphasize that the strategy of the Danish government Lars Løkke Rasmussen III reflects a specific choice that is also political. It is a position that has a focus that is very polemic and taboo in relation to e.g. the Catholic Church, which is known for advocating pro choice; the rights of the unborn child etc. in the UN (Tomalin 2007:7-8). It is not a new position in Danish development cooperation, but one that is continued, where there could have been made a political choice to alter it.

This, I will argue, is because the emphasis on SHRH symbolises specific values that are connected to secularism and the Danish national identity (Wæver 2011a:180). This specific emphasis on SHRH also demonstrates a secular position in relation to the strong religious views that are expressed in the international development environment. Denmark along with other countries form an international alliance that seek to promote SHRH (Gravgaard, Appendix B 2018 :7) and thus stands in strong opposition to the Holy See and states in the UN working to have the right to life and the nuclear family acknowledged (Ford 2014). This reifies the notion that the SHRH presents an approach to gender aspects of development work that has a secular stance and that is very demonstrative almost in its root in human rights and the opposition these rights create in relation to religious principles.

#### **4.5.1 SHRH in the Human Rights Framework**

*"The right to decide over one's own body and own sexuality is a*

*fundamental human right*" (MFA and Danida 2017:35)

In The World 2020, SHRH is described as a fundamental human right. In the priority paper for 2019, it is further argued to be a basic human right that is usually "protected" by countries that "...normally share our views and values." (MFA I 2018: 9). In this description of SHRH we find two perspectives, one related to human rights and the other to Danish values.

SHRH from a Human Rights perspective are anchored in international conventions and treaties (Office of the High Commissioner n.d.) and of course have their legitimacy based on the conventions and the supreme states to remain committed to these conventions, but that does not mean that it cannot be critically examined, in this case in relation to how it is framed in relation to certain ideologies of gender equality and further as Danish values (Wæver 2011a:180-120). It is not only in relation to gender equality that the Danish strategy is referring to the Human Rights (MFA and Danida 2017:2) and there is at such nothing odd in this commitment or reference. It is what most donor perspectives is informed by and this framing, although very common in Western and donor country discourses, must be understood as representing a specific ideology of gender equality that can be understood as secular feminism (Tomalin 2006:102).

When emphasising that SHRH is a fundamental human right it is done so in order to justify working for and promoting SHRH and as something that is fundamental for everyone. By saying this I don't argue whether the justification is wrong or right, but simply bring forward the fact that it illustrates which ideologies are used to legitimize this focus and why it is stated that it is important to ensure SHRH for everybody, although everybody in the discourse found here, is primarily female. This can be said to be self-explanatory in relation to reproductive health, but assumes that men or other gender identities<sup>6</sup> do not hold reproductive rights and sexual health rights.

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. transmen, women who have changes gender identity to men, also hold the right to reproductive health.

When SHRH is here described as a fundamental human right this might be analysed through the three layers Wæver use to illustrate secularism with (Wæver 2011a: 165). In the World 2030 *the preference* that young girls are not be married at an early age is brought forward as a part of securing SHRH (MFA, and Danida 2017:35) is argued with the *principle* that the girl has her individual freedom and has to choose over her own life, based in the *larger value for the wider purpose* of human rights (Wæver 2011a: 165). Although this follows the same structure of argumentation as Wæver critics in secularism, here it is not a wider value that is argued in the separation of religion and politics, but rather in the concrete arguments for specific values (Wæver 2011: 165). In this argumentation based on the Human Rights there is thus not necessarily a secularist discourse according to Wæver where secularism and anti-secularism are argued as fundamental principles (Wæver, 2011a: 165).

While this is not a secularist argumentation, it can still be understood as a secular worldview in the theorization of secular feminism, given that secular feminisms can be rooted in human rights discourses (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008:113) as that does not imply the secularist ideology that requires religion to be outside of politics, but rather it can be blind to how “...*religio-cultural traditions shape ethics.*” (Tomalin 2006:94). This approach to SHRH therefore risk approaching SHRH in a way that does not take religious approaches to SHRH into consideration and from a secular ideological perspective constructing the discourse that it is not important to take religious ethics into consideration. Strengthening this point is the Minister’s approach as stated in her speech given at the Contact Forum in 2018: “...*people have human rights – not religions.*” (Tørnæs 2018a; MFA IV 2018). Here, the rights perspective is very categorical and more important to the individual human being than to religion. The formulation is a bit cryptic, as it is implied that individuals have rights, but they do not *have* religions, or does it mean that people have rights, but *religions* do not have rights? Viewing this alongside the other official documents and material, noting the impact of the secular ideology stressed by Wæver, I lean towards the latter interpretation since the first seems almost to brutal and

inappropriate to declare in a forum talking of Freedom of Religion and Belief. The ideal of human rights is portrayed as universal and non-negotiable and as 'superior' to religious considerations (Tørnæs 2018a). This can be understood as a secular understanding of gender equality where there is no room for discussion of these rights in a religious perspective, because the rights are seen as absolute (Wæver 2006:227).

#### 4.5.2 Gender Equality as a Danish Value

*"Denmark will maintain its position as a strong global advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights."* (MFA and Danida 2017:35)

It is further implied that SHRH and Human Rights reflect Danish values, both in the quote from the priority paper 2019, where it is implied that countries that are normally supporting SHRH work in development are restricting the international initiatives (implicitly referring to the United States and the Gag Rule) normally share the values that Denmark projects itself to stand for. In the 2018 priority paper, the headline for the section of which gender equality is at centre reads: *"Values – democracy, human rights and gender equality"* (MFA II 2017:8) and it continues the emphasis on human rights, here alongside democracy as a Danish value alongside gender equality.

Wæver mentions how the Danish national identity is in crisis and that it therefore has been reconstructed, emphasising secularism and gender equality as prime Danish values (Wæver 2008:217). The Danish national identity can be interpreted as being based on ideas of women as liberated, including sexual liberation and the right to dress as wishes is perceived as inherent to Danish identity and value-base (Andreassen and Siim 2010:20). This becomes a symbol of gender equality in the Danish society and the ideal of gender equality therefore corresponds to this self-identification as a nation that is portrayed as gender egalitarian (ibid.).

### 4.5.3 Partial Conclusion

SHRH is at the core of the Danish approach to gender equality and is framed as a Danish value that corresponds with the Danish national identity, where women are liberated and the secularist approach to gender equality that does not take religious arguments as 'acceptable', but founded in arguments with rational perspectives from the human rights. The human rights approach visible can be interpreted as a secular feminist ideology. This approach risks missing the how the social ethics of gender equality, here under SHRH can be informed by religious-cultural ideology.

## 5. Conclusion

Secularist ideologies in the form of secularism, Danish secularism and secular feminism express themselves in multiple ways throughout the Danish development policies on gender equality. In the official development policies it is mostly secularism that is seen in the description of religion in essentialist terms and presented as an obstacle to gender equality, in accordance with secularist view that religion is a 'thing out there' and in this representation one that has negative implications on gender equality and presents a danger to women and girls. The aspect of Danish secularism that prefers religious actors to be out of public life, is shortly dismissed where religious actors are acknowledged and there are other signs than the discursive indications that the Development Minister and the Foreign Ministry are changing their position on this topic, by acknowledging the importance of religion in relation to development cooperation when it comes to freedom of religion and belief as a motor for women's rights. The Danish secularist idea of religion as dangerous is however present when religion and religious actors are presented as dangerous to girls and women from non-Christian religions. With an implicit differentiation between the freedom of religions and belief for Christian women being in danger of persecution due to their religious stance, and the freedom of religions and

belief for women of other beliefs and religions being in need of protection from their religions and beliefs.

In the discourses regarding freedom of religion and belief and gender equality religion is framed as both a universal right, that is important to protect and a dangerous 'force' that enables individuals to oppress women and girls. Secular feminism is visible in the discourses regarding religions as patriarchal and in the way that gender equality in the form of sexual and reproductive health and rights, to a large extent is argued as a fundamental right, one that springs from the human rights being universal rights. The values can be seen as springing from secular feminist ideologies. This ideological framework can be blind to religio-cultural perspectives of gender equality and religious aspects of individuals' lives and while idealising rights and individualism.

## 6. Epilogue

In this analysis I have only looked at Danish discourses on religion and gender equality, but further research could entail comparative analyses to see what are the differences in gender equality policies in development work across different countries. Investigating whether the conclusion that Danish secularism partially informs the discourses on gender equality, and subsequently how religion is understood in relation to gender equality, will be confirmed or denied when compared to other discourses on the same subject.

Furthermore, the discursive nature of the thesis concentrating on official policy and statement from the Development Minister has left out the concrete initiatives that Danish NGO's and FBO's carry out in this field. In further research nuances on the projects funded by the Danish development cooperation could shine a light on the impact the discourses have on the 'final outcome'. The discursive analysis also presents a static picture and newer material might show another attitude towards religion's role in achieving gender equality.



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