

Must God be dead in Swedish feminist research?

**Isabella Johansson
GNVM03 – VT 2020
Genusvetenskapliga institutionen, Lunds universitet
Handledare: Diana Mulinari**

Abstract

The thesis has two aims. Firstly, to explore and challenge the secularist tradition in Swedish gender studies, as well as, the secularist ideology in the conceptualisation and treatment of religious topics and subject positions. This aim springs out of the need for knowledge production processes that do not structurally erase the voices of peripheralized bodies and minds in a secularised structure, and the necessity of not centring around the values and conception of the world framed through a narrow western secular middle-class male subject position. This will be operationalized through an exploration of the inclusion and exclusion of religion and spirituality in two Scandinavian academic feminist journals. The analysis of the empirical material shows a selective representation of religious topics as either othered or peripheralised. The second aim regards the naturalisation of a specific dominant repetition mentioned in the journals; the normalised conviction of the Christian God as necessarily masculine. This works as a productive consequence of the first aim of the thesis, the unveiling of normalisations, as well as, the example fortifies the unquestioned and veiled secularity within academia. Thus, the thesis is working towards dismantling anti-religious traces and prejudices of religious and spiritual notions within knowledge production in Swedish gender studies.

Key Words:

Secularism, firstness, religion, tradition, politics of naming, spirituality

Index.	PAGE.
INTRODUCTION	4 - 6
PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	7 - 9
<i>PURPOSE.</i>	
<i>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</i>	
BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH FIELD	10 – 16
<i>THE RESEARCH FIELD</i>	
<i>CONSTRUCTED DICHOTOMIES AND THE ROLE OF ACADEMIA</i>	
<i>UNIVERSALISMS AND THE REGULATION OF SOCIAL WORLDS.</i>	
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	17 – 23
<i>FEMINIST CONTRIBUTIONS</i>	
<i>DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE</i>	
<i>INTERSECTIONAL SELVES.</i>	
<i>DICHOTOMIES AND COMPLEXITIES</i>	
<i>HEGEMONIC FEMINISM</i>	
<i>SECULARITY SEEN AS A NON-TRADITION</i>	
METHODOLOGY	24- 33
<i>METHODOLOGY</i>	<i>FEMINIST CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS</i>
<i>CONCEPTS</i>	<i>BINARIES, LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE, TRUTH, TRADITION, POWER.</i>
<i>REFLEXIVITY</i>	
METHOD & MATERIAL	34 – 37
<i>METHOD</i>	
<i>MATERIAL</i>	
<i>OVERVIEW: FIGURES</i>	
ANALYSIS	38 - 67
<i>OVERVIEW AND POINTS OF DEPARTURE</i>	
<i>RELIGION: FEMINIST SELECTIVITY AND TENSION</i>	
<i>RELIGIOUS PROXIMITY AS EXCLUDED FROM AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS</i>	
<i>REPRESENTATION OF RELIGION IN FEMINIST RESEARCH MAGAZINES.</i>	
<i>DISINTERESTEDNESS FROM THE SIDE OF HEGEMONIC GENDER STUDIES.</i>	
<i>THE OTHERED RELIGIOUS SUBJECT</i>	
<i>THE SECULAR 'NEUTRALITY' AND ITS CONNECTION TO THE RELIGIOUS OTHER</i>	
<i>THE RELIGIOUS OTHER.</i>	
<i>IF GOD IS NOT DEAD IN FEMINIST RESEARCH, THEN WHAT IS GOD?</i>	
<i>BRIDGING THE GAP – A NARRATIVE OF CHRISTIAN QUEERS.</i>	
<i>THERE IS A DUALISTIC BREAK OF IDENTITY WAITING TO BE HEALED.</i>	
<i>COMINGLING WITH SPIRITUALITY.</i>	
<i>THE AIM OF ANALYTICAL STRUCTURES THAT ARE AIMING TO BE:</i>	
<i>POSTPATRIARCHAL, POSTCOLONIAL AND POSTSECULAR.</i>	
<i>RELIGIOUS LEGACY OF THE MASCULINISATION OF THE CHRISTIAN GOD.</i>	
<i>GOD IS MADE MAN - AND MAN IS MADE GOD.</i>	
<i>GOD AS HE, SHE, THEY, OR ETERNITY?</i>	
CONCLUSION	68
EPILOGUE	69
THANK YOU	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY	71 - 75

INTRODUCTION

In 2020 the Church of Sweden published what they call a survival guide, in brochure form, for Christian queer teens called '*under the rainbow you are not alone*'¹.

Amongst pastel colours and uplifting words that follow a proposition of full eligibility in one's own process of self-identification in every realm that is important for one's identity, there is also an attempt to create a space for being in between the constructed and hegemonically oppositional dichotomy between faith and feminism. This fabricated tension begs the questions of who, how and concerning what one is allowed to speak about, for, and through religion or spirituality within a hegemonic feminist canon with strong secular frames - and what is left out in the creation of knowledge because it concerns religion and spirituality.

In this thesis I will develop a number of arguments with three main pillars surrounding these topics. Firstly, I will argue that the very well needed process of developing an intersectional analysis² has included the famous triangle of gender, race and class but rarely religion or religious proximity as an important aspect of intersectional theorising. Religion thereby gets minimised and propelled into the private sphere, where it then thrives in a subduing silence³. When topics are not directly related to religion or spirituality in the hegemonic gender discourse, religion becomes an uninteresting matter to analyse. Perhaps this has sprung of the oppressive legacy of structural religious systems of control⁴, and I am not claiming that religions have not possibly used their patriarchal and hierarchal position oppressively, nor do I silence the stringency in analysing the harms and opposition that religious and spiritual topics have given and are giving uprising to. Instead, my project is an exploration about whether the religious subject position and its value judgement is being unheard, silenced or rejected, especially within academic cultures where tension is arising between generally hegemonically different value judgements, such as faiths and feminisms.

¹ Redner, Cecilia, *Under regnbågen står du inte ensam, överlevnadsguide för queerkids*. Svenska Kyrkan Västerås Stift. 2020

² Collins, Patricia Hill. "What's in a name? Womanism, Black feminism, and beyond." *The Black Scholar* 26, no. 1 (1996): 9-17.

³ Singh, Jakeet. "Religious agency and the limits of intersectionality." *Hypatia* 30, no. 4 (2015): 657-674.

⁴ Dhaliwal, Sukhwant, and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Women against fundamentalism*. Lawrence & Wishart, 2014.

Secondly, I will with theoretical and empirical tools argue that when religion is included within the gender studies discourse it is often a matter of an othering process of marginalised groups, of different traditions and of different value judgements. The discussion often falls on how far religion is allowed to take space in a secular room, and thereby canonises different dichotomies between the rational secularist and the religious other, the knowledge producer and knowledge receiver or the progressive secular and the crude traditional. Here I argue that feminist theory aims to develop an intersectional discourse that opens up an analysis of subjects of different ethnicities, genders and classes to be considered, then it is fundamental to realise the importance of religious proximity and its relation to identities – as well as making an analytical, collective systematic effort to not silence religious and spiritual voices and their experiences in the gender studies scholarship. The main text is oriented towards tracing if and how an idea of a secularised, unbiased and neutralised Swedish society is presupposed in its hegemonial expressions of feminisms, as well as, if and in which way the secularised ideal of academia may be void of religious or spiritual experiences, discussions and traces except for when othered, exotified, put in opposition or commercialised.

Thirdly, I will come to the fractions of feminist debates in the periphery of the Swedish gender studies discourse that include a critical discussion on the dominant secularity and important crossroads between gender, religion and philosophy. As I write myself into those fields, I will use their research to guide my argument to include the traces of religion within Swedish gender studies scholarship. Through engaging in the theoretical dialogue within Swedish feminist theory and post/decolonial thought, as well as, the textual analyses of two Swedish magazines on feminist research, I draw the analysis forwards to problematise one of the normalisations that has a strong hold in the cultural reproduction of history - which also comes from supposedly the ‘strongest bastions on heteronormativity’⁵ and gendered hierarchy - namely Christianity and as I will argue, *the gender of the Christian God*.

⁵ Ekström, Malin, and Peter Forsberg. "Tema: Queer teologi (förord)." *lambda nordica* 15, no. 1-2 (2010): 6-9. (translated by me to English from Swedish)

A common proposition within the critical analysis of mainstream knowledge production inspired by feminist, postcolonial and decolonial knowledge⁶ is the standardisation of the western, white, masculine and secular mind and body⁷, which has and is marginalising and ‘othering’ the peripheral traditions outside of the constructed western white masculine and modern/secular worldview⁸. The problematic notion that comes with this proposition, is that mainstream knowledge production hooks onto a white secular method of referring to knowledge and classifies that form as the standard and pre-set tradition of knowledge⁹. Thus, knowledge production becomes critically ‘Western’, as it gets presented as universal¹⁰. Further, knowledge becomes historically narrated for, with and through a masculine construct. These two colossal notions of oppressive and selective classification of knowledge produced, is what I seek to analyse through zooming in on its presence in the Swedish gender studies context.

The balance between realising and dismantling the oppressive traces that the harm, made in the name of religion¹¹, dealing with the danger of generalising religious traditions and subject positions as dangerous or oppressive and the emancipatory power of creating fruitful borderlands between and amongst these tensions, is a very slim line to walk on - but with my thesis will argue that *it is worth it*.

⁶ Haraway, Donna. "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective." *Feminist studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599., Mignolo, Walter. "The communal and the decolonial." *The Communal and the Decolonial* (2010): 245-261.

⁷ I use the concepts of mind and body due to the academic and scientific (the mind) facing a masculine privilege, as well as the masculine bodies are used as the standard measure and point-zero of the experience of being alive.

⁸ Narayan, Uma, Sandra G. Harding, and Sandra Harding, eds. *Decentering the center: Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial, and feminist world*. Indiana University Press, 2000. & Young, Iris Marion. "Thoughts on multicultural dialogue." *Ethnicities* 1, no. 1 (2001): 116-122.

⁹ Kovach, Margaret. *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

¹⁰ Connell, Raewyn. "Using southern theory: Decolonizing social thought in theory, research and application." *Planning Theory* 13, no. 2 (2014): 210-223.

¹¹ Cassidy, Kathryn, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Georgie Wemyss. "Intersectional Border (ing) s." *Political Geography* 66 (2018): 139-141. & Dhaliwal, Sukhwant, and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Women against fundamentalism*. Lawrence & Wishart, 2014.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Purpose

The topic I will explore throughout the thesis is if there is, and if so, how there is a systematic presence of normative and normalised assumptions that make the knowledge production discourse within the Swedish gender studies scholarship hypersecularised¹². If it is so, that may lead to an exclusion of certain forms of knowledge that originate from the construct of the religious ‘Other’ both located in what one could call the Global South, but also in discourses of the ‘traditional’ in Sweden. A fundamental argument in my thesis is to address the notion of standardisation and mainstreaming of knowledge and its production and to state that a standardised discourse is shaping our identities and histories in past, presence and future. To lift Swedish gender studies as a focus in this context in order to dismantle an intersectional line of oppression against marginalised bodies and minds. In order to highlight the problematic notions of holding secularity as a firstness, I will look at the exclusion of religious and spiritual topics within the gender studies scholarship and address the vitality of both holding space for othered voices, as well as, to critically engage with religious and spiritual topics without veiling the legacy of them.

My research questions are inspired by, and become, an extension and variation of the questions asked in the articles by Brown, Butler, Mahmood and Asad (2013) in *‘Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury and free speech’*, where the conceptual separation between a secular and a religious worldview gets questioned and discussed¹³. As they challenge the presumption that critique has to be necessarily secular, as well as, they pry the dichotomy between a traditional religious worldview and a critical secular one, they pose a vital background incentive for my research. However, the authors use these arguments in order to discuss ethics, whereas I will draw their reasoning into the realm of knowledge production. Thus, with their inspirational footprint I will focus on how secularity shapes knowledge production, instead of the discussing the ethical enigma that the authors put into play. This leads

¹² With hypersecularised I mean that secularity has become normalised, naturalised and necessary for critical discussions and freedom of the individual. And that this ‘superior’ position (explained later as a firstness) of secularity becomes unquestioned and seen as a universalist non-tradition.

¹³ Asad, Talal., Brown, Wendy, Butler, Judith, & Mahmood, Saba. (2013). *Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. Fordham Univ Press. p. 14-16

me to converge these ideas onto the academic realm in the field of Swedish gender studies, where knowledge production sometimes might have the same type of problematic distance to otherness¹⁴, where one must address the idea that the prioritisation of the Western and masculine mind and body within the contemporary society also poses a universalist claim of neutral secularity that I will argue to be problematic¹⁵ and where the stipulation and dissemination of what religion is and ought to be, is getting analysed through conducting research on Scandinavian magazines on feminist research. Through dismantling the idea of the normative and normalised secular image of knowledge production, I will opt for the necessity of a postsecular turn in order to include, respect and accommodate peripheralised forms of knowledge, and lift important discussions to a wider audience than what the space of gender studies scholarship occupies¹⁶.

Research Questions

The research questions therefore culminate to a critical discourse analysis¹⁷ discussing two sets of questions. The first concerning the theoretical selectivity of religious matters in the gender studies discourse, particularly in the Swedish context. The second set, being an example of a topic discussed in the feminist research magazines I seek to analyse, concerns the theoretical analysis of the divine as masculine and its normalisation within the Christian context; an attempt of queering theology, and that project's function of dismantling normalisations of dominant discourses.

The thesis is located at the cross-roads between and within academic disciplines and discusses the unveiling of the naturalised normative structures of knowledge production as secular and centred around the westernised masculine body, mind and reality, which has been attributed to both academic knowledge production and Christian divinity.

¹⁴ hooks, bell. "Ain't I a woman: black women and feminism (London: Pluto)." *Challenging Imperial Feminism* 19 (1982).

¹⁵ Balibar, Etienne, Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, and Senior Researcher Immanuel Wallerstein. *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities*. Verso, 1991.

¹⁶ Tlostanova, Madina, and Walter Mignolo. "Global coloniality and the decolonial option." *Kult* 6, no. Special Issue (2009): 130-147., De souza?

¹⁷ Norman Fairclough (1996). A Reply to Henry Widdowson's 'Discourse Analysis: A Critical View. *Language & Literature* 5(1): 49–56., Teun A. Van Dijk. (2008). *Discourse and Power*. Houndsmills: Palgrave, Wodak, Ruth (Ed.) (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis: Four Volumes*. Sage.

My main research questions are thus:

“How is the naturalisation of secular academic knowledge creating a dissonance with the intersectional and decolonial aims of critical gender studies?”

“Does the perhaps similar naturalisation of the masculinity of the Christian god become a non-topic for gender studies scholars?”

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH FIELD

The research field

The background of the thesis will concern on one hand the crossroads between faith and feminism, and on the other, the crossroads of religion and gender studies. The works within the Swedish context by Linda Berg, Mikaela Lundahl and Lena Martinsson '*Secularity – firstness through religion and gender*', Lundahl's '*Should we desecularise the contemporary*' and Asad, T., Brown, W., Butler, J., & Mahmood, S. in their book *Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. will topic-wise stand as a positional aim, where I will draw forth a relevant research field for my thesis. Together with such texts I will formalise a standpoint within gender studies that regards secularity as a neutral position in the Swedish context, its connection to other neutralised firstnesses such as God as masculine, and its harm for subject positions marked as the outsider and other.

In Berg, Lundahl and Martinsson's text on secularity they question the belief that secularism by definition is the *condition* of critique and self-criticism, distinguished from religious orthodoxy, which is regularly held as dogmatic and traditional. As they problematise the standard normative account of secularism as a principle of state neutrality towards religion, they pose an issue of how some societies are being 'understood to be stuck in a culture of unreason and belief, fealty, orthodoxy and religious authority'¹⁸. Further, they mean that the normative dimensions of secularism converge with the claim of western civilizational superiority. To take their research further, does for me mean to question precisely what consequences the secular firstness has on how we produce our society, and thus, to my main focus, that the hegemonic Swedish gender studies scholarship produces knowledge within a stronghold of a secularised tradition, and what that firstness leaves out.

The focus of my thesis lies in knowledge production through the precise lens of the gender studies scholarship within a secularised Swedish context with Christian

¹⁸ Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. *Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. Fordham Univ Press, 2013. p. 15 (intro)

historical pillars. The notion I want to get at is precisely if there is a current normalisation of the secular tradition within the Swedish context, and how it plays out in the Swedish gender studies context. In order to do so I analyse the articles within the Swedish magazine *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap*, and the Nordic queer journal *Lambda Nordica*, and how they are including and excluding religious topics.

Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap, TGV, is the Nordic region's largest peer-reviewed journal for current interdisciplinary gender research. TGV presents new research, introduces theories and concepts and invites researchers, activists, feminists and others to present current gender-relevant issues. The idea of TGV is to continue to reflect the diversity of voices in the gender science area. *Lambda Nordica* is a peer-reviewed open-access academic journal of LGBTQ studies. The oldest of its kind in the Nordic region, the journal is dedicated to interdisciplinary research in lesbian/gay/bi/trans* and queer studies. For the past 10 years, *Lambda Nordica* has been an academic journal aimed at researchers, teachers and students, but the zine was originally dedicated to homosexuality research, and was and is aimed at a broader audience.

Constructed dichotomies and the role of academia.

In the next section, I am presenting the feminist and religious motifs of creating or persevering the borderland between the two. This is not because I hold that they always stand in opposition, nor because there is a clear homogenous feminist or religious 'side'. Rather, because the tension and movement between and amongst the two hegemonic topics has discursive and emancipatory potential.

On the feminist side, one could mean that the Christian religious legacy in Sweden distracts feminist objectives at its very basis. As we look at the history of colonialization through the Christian conviction, and its legacy of binaries within right and wrong, pure and impure, virtues and vices, masculine and feminine¹⁹, we can trace a discordance between faith and feminism in its very theoretical essence, precisely since the Christian religion claims to have exactly that; an essence, a purpose and an ideal of how to be pure and right, and the idea of being created as an

¹⁹ Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Random House, 2014. p. 130

image of a masculinised God²⁰. Although there are many examples of feminist Christian scholars, such as Wollstonecraft, who argued for women's rights within a religious discourse, and also early Swedish feminists such as Ellen Key, whom in her writings adhered to the notion of God and Christianity due to the eminence of Christianity in her particular era, the conundrum of faith and feminism is often of a very selective form, and are in a Swedish secular context a rarity as a discursive combination, a discussion that I will take up in the analysis later on.

The article *A Religious Feminist – Who Can Find Her?* by Ann Braude, portrays an historiographical challenge of finding this particular intersection through making explicit the implicit contemporary tensions over feminism and Christianity. She means that there is a notable scarcity of historical examinations that combine attention to both religion and feminism. In discussing the historicity of feminism, she concludes that in most accounts of second wave feminism, Christianity rarely appears, and if so, only as a source of *opposition*²¹. The narratives portraying religions exclusively as enemies of feminism during the last ten years, she writes in 2004, outnumber early publications that included religious women. Furthermore, Braude states that the small number of works that focused on the history of religious feminism have aimed to discredit the movements they describe, depicting feminism as a threat to authentic faith²². In her own words 'Critical accounts of religious feminism share a common assumption with accounts of feminist history that exclude religion: both approaches view religion and feminism as inherently incompatible, as opposing forces in modern culture.'²³. Thus, it seems so that the religious and feminist identity becomes a rarity and an epistemic glitch of seemingly incompatible beliefs, values and traditions²⁴.

²⁰ I use the concept of masculinisation instead of masculine due to that it is an attribution to a being that has no clear self-acquired confirmation of that. Neither the body/non-body or the concept of God is clearly masculine in essence, as masculinity is an attribution. Further, the masculinisation of God is not highlighted as a critique to Christianity or religious subjects or the alike, but due to its importance for my analysis of the masculine concept of God.

²¹ Braude Ann "A Religious Feminist—Who Can Find Her? Historiographical Challenges from the National Organization for Women" p. 556

²² Ibid. p. 557

²³ Ibid. p. 557

²⁴ I do not mean to evaluate this oppositional relation as purely negative, nor saying that there are no exceptions to it. I hold that the dichotomy was emancipatory and furthered feminist political goals, but I am highlighting it due to the argument of why both the religious and feminist realms, and all the borderlands in between them may profit from a critical discursive discussion between and amongst them.

Through an analysis of both the theoretical and empirical project of my thesis the majority of philosophical and socio-political discussions that bridge feminism and religion as far as I can see²⁵, are those of othered religions, of Islam in the secular world, the question of religious symbols and freedom, of the religious outsider should or should not be assimilated within the idea of the Swedish neutral and secular society. The fear of fundamental religiosity, conspicuously connected to 9/11 and the constructed connection between terrorism and Islam, has reinforced the binary opposition between secularism and rationalism, which is also discussed within *Is critique secular?*. This becomes a further slippery slope in order to obliterate knowledge-producing accounts made on religious grounds or other motives that follow a different scientific and philosophical tradition. This topic will be discussed within the paragraphs on tradition and the epistemic advantage of secularity in a secularised academic context.

On the religious side, the feminist subjugation in the secularised institutions within the Swedish culture seemingly becomes a critique against a divine essence, a sacred text and practice preached, where the verses of categorisation and hierarchies are often seen as permanent, as well as, contradictory to feminist objectives of anti-essentialism and deconstructivism. Thus, in what we could call a western secular society, the sea between faith and feminism only seems bridgeable through a very arduous way of being²⁶. In Talal Asad's contribution on Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism in *Is Critique Secular?* he presents a helpful analogous claim on the putative divide between 'Western' and 'non-Western' traditions of critique and practice. This putative divide is also visible in the secular and non-secular. The constructed discord between the 'religious' and 'secular' does also contribute to the organisation of who is supposed to be appropriate to act and get represented in different political spheres. In the Swedish context the political sphere, as posed by the scholars presented above in *Secularities – firstness through religion and gender*, is supposed to be free from religion and consist of rational individuals who have left their faith in the private sphere and have internalised the rules and norms of the

²⁵ I am arguing this from the selected material and theoretical information gained during the process of this thesis. It would need to be analysed further to make such a claim on a broader scale.

²⁶ Of course, there are contradicting examples of what I am explaining here, but the principle persists. There is a struggle going with justifying oneself, one's ethical and moral convictions and standpoints, one's sides and supporters, when living in the borderlands between faith and feminism. See *the Swedish creative writing authors and spoken word artists Nino Mick and Yolanda Ramirez Bohm for further insights*.

nation. The authors hold that this performative secularism needs to be examined in order to unveil the structures of othering that persist in the secular paradigm²⁷. Thus, secularity performs a neutrality that marks the core of societal structures, and believers, especially Muslims, are expected to adhere, adjust, minimise and privatise their faith. The authors claim that the very possibility of that there are constructed secular subjects who can pose such demands on others shows the presence of the privileged secular position in that context, thus secularity becomes a firstness²⁸.

Universalisms and the regulation of social worlds.

The decolonial philosopher, Ramón Grosfoguel, discusses the centrality of the subject position of the category of the Western man and the veiled control held by those who occupy that space. The idea and the construction of the Western man, he means, stems from a cartesian universalism and worldview of ‘I conquer, therefore I am’²⁹. The Western man does, therefore, become the ‘point zero’, from where everything originates, develops and is narrated from. Furthermore, the masculine and their conceptualised bodies and minds are conditioned to hold the ‘godly view of the world’ and the seemingly objective knowledge trapped within this widespread veil of Western masculine perspectives as centralised. This normative basis of knowledge production does not only concern white middle-class women as often pinpointed in Western secular feminist academic scholarship but an entire sea of minorities and majorities of people with a set of principles different from that of the Western man³⁰. The process of legitimising knowledge is therefore in the hand of the white Western man, where minorities and oppressed groups in society struggle to get their knowledge considered, which also plays a stringent role for why and how academia’s secularised mechanisms work as a control mechanism in order to prevent non-secular forms of knowledge production. Thus, the White Western male structurally presses those forms of knowledge to the periphery and centralises its own³¹.

²⁷ Berg, Linda, Mikela Lundahl, and Lena Martinsson. "Sekularitet-förstahet genom religion och kön." *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 4 (2016). (4): 8

²⁸ Ibid. 16

²⁹ Grosfoguel, Ramón. "Colonial difference, geopolitics of knowledge, and global coloniality in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* (2002): 203-224.

³⁰ Akena, Francis Adyanga. "Critical analysis of the production of Western knowledge and its implications for Indigenous knowledge and decolonization." *Journal of Black Studies* 43.6 (2012): 599-619.

³¹ Foucault, "Powers and Strategies," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 142-145

As history gets written by men, for men, of men and about men, writer's like the feminist scholars Joan Scott and Silvia Federici work on rewriting the history as it is stated, to include voices unheard and oppressions undocumented³². With the historicization of secularism within the French society, Joan Scott argues, there are countless accounts of feminisms suppressed by those very structures. Scott, in her book *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, presents the way in which the individuals got secularised in France during the enlightenment, and how the ideal of the masculine gets infiltrated in this desired reasonability of secularity. Through prioritising the necessity of consensus amongst the masses in order to achieve political stability, she argues, the state wanted to produce citizens who represented themselves as 'republicans'. There the education was free, compulsory and secular and the schools were to inculcate "that religion of the Fatherland... that cult and that love at once ardent and reasoned, with which we want to penetrate the heart and mind of the child"³³. Through education, amongst other factors, children were to become not just patriots, but reasoning, scientific, logical thinkers – an example of a secular ideal, and the Third Republic's reverence for rationalism, positivism, secularism and science^{34 35}.

One topic that often flies by unnoticed through the societal conflicts of who and on which basis one can contribute to the air castle of knowledge produced, is critical discourse analyses of religion. The current system of knowledge production in the Swedish context stems from a now secular worldview with Christian heritage, which does also mean that discourses surrounding religion and spirituality become redundant to the 'superior' secular world. In Silvia Federici's book, one of the most influential feminist critiques of gender and capitalism, *Caliban and the Witch*, a critical rewriting of the history of the body in the uprising of capitalism, Christianity is presented as a tool for regulating society and the female coded body – an oppressive force that eliminated the experiences and knowledge produced by the

³² Federici, Silvia. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch*. Autonomedia & Scott, Joan Wallach. *Only paradoxes to offer*. Harvard University Press, 1996.

³³ Scott, Joan Wallach. *Only paradoxes to offer*. Harvard University Press, 1996. p. 92

³⁴ Ibid. p. 103

³⁵ This is not to say that this is wrong or right, but to pinpoint that there is a trend, tradition and ideal, also in a secularised society, that shape a specific way in relating to the world.

Other³⁶, something that we will later connect to the Foucauldian criticism of 'tradition'. The bridge between religion and feminism does therefore become a mission of going back to the roots of values within the 'Western' society, which Federici also argues for in her book, as an attempt of unveiling a structure that blinds topics that stand in the centre of attention. This act of unveiling will condition the very possibility of situated, non-universalist knowledge production³⁷. Thus, the bridge between religion and feminism becomes an example of a paradigm in knowledge production that concerns coloniality, secularity and White supremacy within academia, and tries to dismantle that which is veiled and normalised. The question of how to dismantle White supremacy, Grosfoguel argues³⁸, in knowledge production becomes a matter of asking for a postsecular understanding of academia in order to create a decolonial, non-patriarchal, antiglorification of the white mainstream knowledge production. The necessity for a perhaps decolonial or posthuman critique that deals with religion from an insider perspective, becomes crucially relevant in order to include repressed, forgotten and ignored voices that speak through, with and about religious and spiritual questions in the gender studies scholarship.

³⁶ Federici, Silvia. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch*. Autonomedia.

³⁷ Grosfoguel, Ramón. (2002). Colonial difference, geopolitics of knowledge, and global coloniality in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system. *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 203-224.

³⁸ Ibid.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist contributions.

Aiming for a submersion in the gender studies scholarship, and through situating the analysis in the Swedish context, the research field will move in the directions of scholars discussing secularism and the selectivity of religious and spiritual content in the gender studies scholarship. Thus, what this content is represented as, what it is used for, what it is lacking and which emancipatory potential there is in an inclusive feminist theological scholarship, a queered religiosity or/and religious and spiritual discussions in feminist scholarship.

The selection of working through feminist theory comes out of the same narrative as presented by Karin Sporre's doctoral dissertation called *First when we get faces: a multicultural dialogue on feminism, ethics and theology*. While writing into the borderland between feminist theory and theology, she claims that the perspective and basis of feminist theory *within* Swedish theological research is not used on a larger scale³⁹. Through this rarity, she poses that such a research approach can contribute to a critical discussion and renewal of existing traditions of research⁴⁰. The frames, considerations and rhetorical space she creates, will work as a guide in order to write into the cross-over between gender studies and theology but being grounded in feminist theory.

Decolonial perspective.

Secularity as a firstness, the concept that I presented in the research background, does structurally silence what lies in the periphery of both society and knowledge production. Here I am inspired by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *Can the*

³⁹ This insight also hinges onto the very important project of queering religiosity, spirituality and religion – an area for further research which will not take predominant space in this thesis due to its immense scope, but portrays a site-worthy comment on why the gender studies discourse has perhaps distanced itself from religion and spirituality and why the tension between faith and feminism perhaps was and is sometimes necessary for productive activist interests. However, the place for political action that was given within this tension also creates the distance between the two topics that may be unproductive in another way. Namely to create multiple feminisms where spirituality and religion is included in a critical and discursive scenario that I find necessary in order to dismantle ongoing hierarchies within society.

⁴⁰ Sporre, Karin. (1999). *Först när vi får ansikten: Ett flerkulturellt samtal om feminism, etik och teologi* (Vol. 9). Lund University: 44

Subaltern speak?, to use as a point of departure for my theoretical frame, which specifies the historical and ideological elements that impede the subjects of the periphery to get recognised. The possibility of political subjectivity, and through that the contextualisation within subaltern and postcolonial studies, specifies the dominant narrative that I'm seeking to dismantle. Drawing on Derrida, Spivak calls into question the narratives of the experiences of the impossible. She means that there is a lack of peripheral subject positions within knowledge producing discourses, that stand outside of academical traditions such as black and indigenous feminisms and subaltern theory. Through this theoretical background narrative, I will explore if the secularised academical space has made theories and empiricism from the periphery invisible within knowledge production in the Swedish gender studies discourse.

Intersectional selves.

Through embracing the theoretical thought of being intersectional selves I will rest on Groenhout & Bower's framework the balance between philosophy, religion and feminism. They present a triangular relationship between philosophy, faith and feminism with their research. Through asking the question of 'how can one live with the seemingly immiscible combination of being a philosopher, belonging to a traditional religion, and being a feminist?', they pose that being 'intersectional selves' is tricky if those selves are at the intersection of opposing systems of belief, which they mean that philosophy, faith and feminism sometimes are. Through their analysis they ask philosophers to reflect on the three life-formative commitments of philosophy, feminism and religion and their tensions. They argue that feminist philosophical work has frequently developed critiques of reasons and the purity of the conclusion particular reasonings have purported to achieve. Through that the feminist commitments that they are discussing seem to prohibit an unqualified commitment to reason. Further they mean that these commitments seem to require a scrutiny of religious traditions, particularly when those faith traditions have impeded women's development, and this scrutiny, they write, appears at odds with a wholehearted faith commitment. Likewise, they argue, that traditional religions have sometimes been potent forces for denying the opportunities for women to exercise

political, religious or social power⁴¹, and that thus, traditional religions are rarely comfortable environments for cultural critics such as feminists. Like what we will see in Chicana and Mestiza literature, the analysis portrays that to work within the tensions one can generate fruitful philosophical reflections as it focuses not on the existence of tension between the commitments per sé, but how to respond to them⁴².

Thus, there is a border of faith and feminism, not only an ethical dilemma between practical matters and political ideologies but also an epistemological and methodological predicament that can be used productively to create formative borderlands and possibilities for an extensive leap between and above the current knowledge spectrums within the scholarships I discuss. The borderland sets up a stringent and binary border, and a set of conditions, views, thoughts and structures surrounding each side of that border, and to create possibilities we have to loosen the rigid structures, normalisations and conditions that shape that border. Anzaldúa writes;

*“Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.”*⁴³.

Dichotomies and complexities.

The social anthropologist, Talad Asad, holds that the tension between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ is a productive one for the exercise of critique inasmuch as it suspends the closure necessary to political action so as to allow thinking to proceed in unaccustomed ways⁴⁴. This is a conceptual framework relevant for a number of arguments that I will use in order to claim that it also holds for the tension that has risen between faith and feminism, and the secular and non-secular in the Swedish context. The separation of secular and non-secular is nothing but a tension of two

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/la frontera*. Vol. 3. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987. p. 34

⁴⁴ Asad, Talal., Brown, Wendy., Butler, Judith., & Mahmood, Saba. (2013). *Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. Fordham Univ Press. p. 86

blurry conceptions of truth within social sciences, where I now write into the productive possibility of allowing thought and knowledge production to spring out in unaccustomed methods, theories, techniques and discourses. Asad believes that academia remains one of the few places where such tensions can still be explored due to the dialectic space between topics that create tension⁴⁵. That is also why I find it particularly important to discuss the tension of faith and feminism that I also situate myself into within the reflexive part of the thesis – because it is often seen an emotional paradox that perhaps academia opens up a space to unravel and obliterate, an emancipatory action that may be hard without the dialectical space that academia provides.

I will show that the crossroads between faith and feminism are diverse and complex, and that a general statement on what it means to be a habitant thereof would be a simplification similar to the impossibility of capturing all feminisms under one umbrella slogan. But there are experiences, theories and discussions that I can adhere to in order to create possibilities within this scope of complexity.

Hegemonic Feminism.

To capture the immense scope of feminism is impossible, it is also impossible to generalise within feminisms. However, gender studies and its discourse does present an institution with particular frameworks – also feminism has a hegemonic framework of what fits into it and what does not, even if it is expansive, transitory and malleable. In order to detect important mechanisms within an institution or a system, one has to look at the power relations within them. This does not mean that I am generalising the term feminism, nor gender studies but that I am searching for important mechanisms that makes these concepts into being. Inspired by Antonio Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, I see hegemonic feminism as the political or cultural dominance or authority within the feminist discourse⁴⁶. It is the leading forms of feminism, as layered as it may be, that holds the strongest biopower in the

⁴⁵ Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. *Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. Fordham Univ Press, 2013.p. 86

⁴⁶ Hall, Stuart (1986). "The Problem of Ideology — Marxism without Guarantees" (PDF). *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. 10 (2): 28–44.

Gramsci, Antonio (1992). Buttigieg, Joseph A (ed.). Prison Notebooks. New York City: Columbia University Press.

Liinason Mia and Clara Meijer (2018) Challenging constructions of nationhood and nostalgia: exploring the role of gender, race and age in struggles for women's rights in *Scandinavia. Women's History Review*. 27: 5: 72

society I base my studies in. For me, it becomes stringent to understand that there are traditions within the feminist discourse that need to be discussed and analysed.

Secularity seen as a non-tradition

Within academia, seeing secularity as a non-tradition becomes a problematic view that can lead to an exclusion of knowledge production that is precisely set within these types of traditions and is silencing precisely the voices of minorities which follow somewhat of a 'traditional' tradition. This may very easily reinforce a secularised and relativized form of Western knowledge as centralised, however this is also a form of tradition. Moreover, the what one could call Western knowledge production apparatus is also married to the Western conception of science, which degrades and minimises other ways of seeing and constructing knowledge, reason, history and tradition.

Tradition, which according to Nietzsche and then also Foucault, establishes ethical and moral ideals that underlie all conventions and oppressions. What Nietzsche writes here becomes a critique of all traditions but the one he stands within; the veiled tradition of white masculine supremacy, also within knowledge production. To veil the postmodern, relativist and secular tradition as a non-tradition, is thus an unintended tool in order to silence minorities and oppressed groups which use and live within other traditions. The same goes for the western conception of science, something that is now veiled as natural, universal and normative, and excludes other forms of science as non-science or pseudoscience. A universalist idea is thus following secularity, even if in those critical tradition, a universalist idea and ideal is not supposed to exist in the first place. Further, the Swedish scholars do in their article on secularism as a firstness argue that the firstness of secularism also appears as unnoticed and becomes an 'objective and natural centre for those who are privileged because of it'⁴⁷ Further, they mean that secularism works as an evaluating performative space and identity, where 'race', gender, sexuality, society and nationality is done within the binary field between religious and secular⁴⁸. There, the secular is portrayed as normal, intelligible and rational, and the other is represented

⁴⁷ Berg, Linda, Mikela Lundahl, and Lena Martinsson. "Sekularitet-förståhet genom religion och kön." *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 4 (2016).16 (translated by me from Swedish)

⁴⁸ Ibid.16

as irrational, traditional and potentially dangerous. Thus, there is a preeminent idea of what fits into the picture of the secular ‘neutrality’, of that all should structurally be able to take space in an equitable way⁴⁹. The firstness, the authors claim, comes to being through both excluding religion, uppermost Islam, and through that secularity gets intertwined with other forms of firstness or intersections thereof. The authors exemplify these interlinked forms of firstnesses and name them as: modernity, whiteness, Swedishness, objectivity and the market. All these phenomena and their status as firstness contribute to a claim of universality which creates an intensified process of othering⁵⁰. Through this universalist claim of normative and positive liberal neutrality, secularism paves the way for a deep-stretching othering process, that silently excludes all but what has become performatively neutral. Parallel to the naturalisation of this westernised conception of knowledge production, religious successively becomes not only ignored and selectively discussed by gender scholarship but seen as a threat towards the upheld statutes of the mainstreamed hegemonic secular feminist thought.

As Saba Mahmood conceptualises the conflict between secular necessity and religious threat, it also becomes clear that the threat of religious extremism effects the way gender studies scholarship sees religious interventions, and discussions about, around and within religion – which I also discussed in the section on previous research and the empirical study of the magazines. Mahmood describes firstly how the secular rationality has come to define law, state craft and knowledge production and economic relations, but also how it has transformed the conceptions, practice and institutions of religious life. She means that by historicising the ‘truth’ of secular reason and the questioning of its normative claims one spurs this threat by paving the way for religious fanaticism to take hold of institutions and society itself. The threat of ‘religious extremism’ becomes a scarecrow in order to take out all religious and ‘traditional’ legacy, discussion and values from institutions and society itself. The concept and basis of religious traditions therefore gets held captive as a dangerous tool within itself, and out of societal and academic matters in order to not infiltrate society with this threat of religiousness⁵¹. Mahmood means that the

⁴⁹ Ibid. 8

⁵⁰ Ibid. 16

⁵¹ Mahmood, Saba. (2013). Religious reason and secular affect: An incommensurable divide, in *Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. Fordham Univ Press. (2013): 58

examples of banning the veil, or the Danish Cartoon of Muhammad show a tendency to be *for* secular values and their secular liberal principles of freedom in such societies, without taking into consideration the very rigid form of the secular liberal tradition that this being veiled as neutral mechanisms, and what then these types of actions are *against*. Mahmood writes that secular liberal principles of freedom of religion and speech are not neutral mechanism for the negotiation of religious difference and that they remain partial to certain normative conceptions of religion, subject and language⁵². Her claim also presents us with the constructed dichotomy of being either against secular values, or for them. An imagined construct which chisels itself into knowledge production as a truth and secularised trend where the indifference of religious matters becomes a way to actively look around and not within religion. It also poses that secularity is a neutral apparatus that is necessitated within knowledge production. *Thus, secularity becomes a non-tradition.*

⁵² Ibid. 58 - 62

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I aim for a methodological reflection over the concepts I am using through the thesis, as well as, a reflection on the research process and my role as a researcher. The epistemological frames will become clear from these concepts and important insights and viewpoints for the analysis will be given here.

Critical discourse analysis.

Foucauldian discourses are historically dependent collective structures that produce practices which methodically form the objects of which they speak. Through discourse we can organise knowledge that systematises human relations through collective understanding. A discourse, whether marginalised or dominant or in between or both, is produced through effective power throughout the social order which shape the criteria and thus the legitimacy of knowledge and truth within its own order⁵³.

Feminism, gender studies and critical studies have as a fundamental practice of theorising and resisting the male universal sought to destabilise systematic practices and theories of dominance. Academic and theoretical dialogues on power relations, systematic oppression and other forms of injustices has made a significant contribution to how knowledge production is conducted through the theorisation of moving social powers. Critical discourse analysis views language as a form of sociality, a social practice that creates and perpetuates societal power relations. Through that framework, one can work philosophically within dominant discourses in order to dismantle traditions that are set as truths.

Michelle Lazar writes:

“As feminist critical discourse analysts, our central concern is with critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group. One of the aims is to show that social practices on the whole, far from being neutral, are in fact gendered in this way.” ⁵⁴

⁵³ Foucault, Michel. "Orders of discourse." *Social science information* 10, no. 2 (1971): 7-30.

⁵⁴ Lazar, Michelle, ed. *Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power and ideology in discourse*. Springer, 2005. p. 5

Further, using feminist critical discourse analysis as a methodological framework means to practice the theoretical argument that there is no essential, natural or mandatory order of sociality, centrality, language or power. The society is through this performativity thereby extremely malleable – and to use this framework is an attempt to break become critical of the normalised notions and systems within the dominant discourses of society. What is captured within feminist critical discourse analysis, create the very possibility for me to write this thesis. Since I’m working through a broad set of philosophical, linguistical and analytical concepts that surround the crossroads of faith and feminism – and especially within the latter analysis about the masculine gendering of the Christian God – CDA creates the academic space to have interdisciplinary discussions about provocative topics.⁵⁵

Through understanding and analysing the discursive field of the Church, I will use language, power, identity and other processes to analyse my philosophical question of what ought to be the pronoun of God and why the current pronoun of God in Abrahamic religions is ‘he’ and if it is possible to create a non-androcentric notion of the Christian God.

CONCEPTS

Binaries.

Western traditions are tinted in binary processes that come to limit and constrain thought processes which are taken for granted. This system was first named by Gayle Rubin as the “sex-gender system” and it disclosed a structure of oppression and perpetuation of a normative world⁵⁶. A dominant binary division has put masculinity and femininity in opposition, hence the notion of, for example the Christian God, as purely masculine comes with a row of other binaries that Wilshire sheds a light on with a binary opposition table⁵⁷ where feminine presented in the right column and masculine on the left.

⁵⁵ Norman Fairclough (1996). A Reply to Henry Widdowson's 'Discourse Analysis: A Critical View. *Language & Literature* 5(1): 49–56., Teun A. Van Dijk. (2008). *Discourse and Power*. Houndsmills: Palgrave, Wodak, Ruth (Ed.) (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis: Four Volumes*. Sage.

⁵⁶ Rubin, Gayle. "The traffic in women: Notes on the "political economy" of sex." (1975).

⁵⁷ Wilshire, Donna. "The uses of myth, image, and the female body in re-visioning knowledge." *Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist reconstructions of being and knowing* (1989) p. 95-96

“Male	Female
Knowledge (accepted wisdom)	Ignorance (the occult and taboo)
Good, positive	Bad, negative
Mind (ideas), head, spirit	Body (flesh) womb (blood), nature (earth)
Reason (the rational)	Emotions and feelings (the irrational)
Cold	Hot
Order	Chaos
Control	Letting be, allowing, spontaneity
Objectivity (outside, ‘out there’)	Subjective (inside, immanent)
Literal truth, fact	Poetic truth, metaphor, art
Goals	Process
Light	Darkness
Written text, logos	Oral tradition, enactment, myth
Public sphere	Private sphere
Seeing, detached	Listening, attached
Linear	Cyclical
Permanence, ideal (fixed) forms	Change, fluctuations, evolution
“Changeless and immortal”	Process, ephemera (performance)
Hard	Soft
Independent, individual, isolated	Dependent, social, interconnected, shared”

Through these binary categorisations Gannon and Davies argue for the possibility of recognising one’s social gender identity spectra through looking at the ‘appropriate’ side of the table⁵⁸. The table works as an ordering stratagem for ruling out combinations and deviances.

Likewise, for my project on the masculinisation of God inspired by the topics of the feminist research magazines that I use as a material throughout the thesis, the table

⁵⁸ Gannon, Susanne, Bronwyn Davies (2012). “Postmodern, Post-Structural, and Critical Theories.” In Hesse-Biber’s *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*. p. 72

works as a marker for what God is through representation seen from the outside⁵⁹. God in Abrahamic faith is described as incomprehensible in knowledge, justice and vision. Through its mystical, indivisible and never-ending presence outside of time and space, it becomes very peculiar how the gender and sex of God becomes so obviously masculine through its tradition

Through Wilshire's table we can see how the very use of language perpetuates ideas about what characteristics something is limited to, as well as we can see how typically feminine traits become downgraded into less-divine than its masculine 'opposite'. Through identifying God as solely male means both a limitation for the indefinable godliness that the eternal is supposed to represent, as well as a downgrading vigour for the classically categorised feminine traits. Through Luce Irigaray's argument in 'The Sex which is not One', we can turn the table towards that the feminine here is represented as a reflection of what is constructed to be masculine⁶⁰. This may be even more detrimental for the non-masculine embodied beings in society, to not only be an opposition, but merely a reflection of the masculine. Merely a mirage, and illusion, a mirror reflection.

Language.

Through using poststructuralism, I will dismantle the very language used with pronouns and binaries within the concept of God in order to combine queer-feminist theory, and religious studies and theology in the analytical section on the topic. I want to shed light on how one might criticise the androcentric religious language to break its androcentrism from both the inside (theology) and the outside (gender studies) Nevertheless, what the current feminist theology is agreeing on currently, is that the biblical male God and the androcentric metaphorical language in theological discourses ought to be changed due to various reasons.

Poststructuralism marks a possible shift in Western philosophy as well as social constructive theory that portrays that language itself is seen as powerful and should

⁵⁹ However, from the inside, masculinity within the Christian tradition has come to follow the exemplar of Jesus., which takes up a significant amount of labels put on the feminine.

⁶⁰ Irigaray, Luce. "This sex which is not one (1977)." *New York* (1985).

constantly be opened up for revision⁶¹. The deconstruction of language is a profound critique towards assumed truth and justified beliefs that is analysing the subconscious every-day occurrences and thought instances that build up our social belonging and possibility and direction of agency⁶².

Truth.

The Foucauldian focus lies on how discourses have moulded systems of meaning that then become settled as justified knowledge claims and thus, ‘truth’. These dominate how we order and conceptualise ourselves and our world and pinpoints us and our truths as a function of historically specific discourses. Foucault’s discursive field is an attempt to understand the magnetisms between language, social institutions, power and the subject. Each discursive field contains its own contradictions in underlying discourses that contain capillary functions of power that organise social institutions and processes.

Foucault means that ‘The novelty lies no longer in what is said but, in its reappearance,’⁶³ hence the notion of truth lies in its own repetition. God is perhaps one of the most recurrent figures of ‘truth’, ‘universality’ and ‘essentialism’ that are out there. As feminist deconstructive works regards undoing sedimented truths through which they might otherwise be held captive⁶⁴, it becomes almost contradictory to work on a notion such as God from a poststructural perspective of that kind. However, the point of not defining concepts in poststructuralism also fits into the theological project of the notion of God, which is claimed to be indefinable, uncontainable and incomparable. Perhaps it is more than suitable to take the concept of God into the paradigm of poststructuralist thought to deconstruct and declutter the indefinable concept of God from the social organism of church. Its persistence in a religious discourse led by the church has historically generated a socially controlled public. Foucault’s institutions of education, hospitals, prisons have similar controlling mechanisms towards the public.

⁶¹ Gannon, Susanne, Bronwyn Davies (2012). “Postmodern, Post-Structural, and Critical Theories.” In Hesse-Biber’s *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*. p. 75

⁶²Ibid. p. 76

⁶³ Foucault, Michel. *Archaeology of knowledge*. Routledge, 2013. p. 221

⁶⁴ Gannon & Davies (2012) “Postmodern, Post-Structural and Critical Theories.” p. 85

As soon one puts down an epistemic reality as not a potential proof, but a proof itself, that very discourse becomes a technique of control and discipline⁶⁵. Exactly this notion of control and discipline is what is to be found in organised Christian churches, where rules from the eternal invisible constitute a grand-scaled panopticon through which the deeds of the public are all being observed by the highest, masculine patriarch. But then again, the Church is only the institutionalisation of what at its eminent centre is connection to some extracelestial force or being. In Jack Halberstam's analysis of the song 'No Church in the Wild', proposes a social reform within essentialist and normative categories. He promotes an anarchical stance where institutions are built within social interactions but are not set categorical instances. 'There is No Church in the Wild' promotes the idea of that there is no bank, but there is money, there is no church, but there is spirituality. In this manner, society persists without social control and normative cohesion. Halberstam's argument goes through reclaiming words and symbols through not refusing but turning them into what they ought to represent from a feminist standpoint⁶⁶. For my project, that means to pull out the concept of God out of the institutionalised and controlling Church and adhere to the more omnipotent qualities of God as indescribable, uncontainable and incomparable instead.

Tradition

Since the concept of firstness is particularly important for my thesis, it is important to realise that this firstness is merely one of many possible particular traditions. However, due to its superior position as precisely a firstness, it does not get recognised as a tradition, but truth and normality. And as we will see here, a necessity for freedom, which will be relevant whilst discussing the religious other and the presupposed captivity within all traditions that are not firstnesses. This means that firstnesses constitute 'freedom for the individual', whereas tradition are constructed as holding othered subject positions in captivity.

Nietzsche embraces the idea of that the free human being is the one outside of tradition, something that victimises and imprisons the religious and traditional

⁶⁵ Foucault, Michel. "Orders of discourse." *Social science information* 10, no. 2 (1971): 7-30.

⁶⁶ Halberstam, J. Jack. *Gaga feminism: Sex, gender, and the end of normal*. Vol. 7. Beacon Press, 2012.

subject, in a way that it excludes them from critical knowledge production within their situatedness, and their potentiality to reach wider attention and recognition.

Nietzsche writes;

*“In things in which no tradition commands there is no morality; and the less life is determined by tradition, the smaller the circle of morality. The **free** human being is immoral because in all things he is determined to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition.⁶⁷”*

However, what is it to depend on oneself but to depend on one’s own tradition? And as I am observing the secularised knowledge production, it seems that this tradition is upheld through measures that do not necessarily come straight from the individual, but from precisely the secular tradition surrounding the subject. In the perhaps most famous Nietzschean statement ‘God is dead, and we have killed him’, there is an underlining message of that the secularised world has risen in a way that makes it depend on secularised values and traditions without a trace. The secularised reality that we live in depend on the collective faith in concepts such as nation, money, capitalism, and human rights – to simplify these as universal truths for how to build society does uphold a particular type of hierarchy between the peripheral and central roles that people, ethnicities, genders or religious/secular identities occupy. What this means for academic scholarship is that there is clear form and tradition to write knowledge into, and if a particular individual, project or institution does not fit into that standard, it will be systematically excluded from the knowledge producing entities that govern academia.

Power.

Power is the play between control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects. It is practiced within discourses in shaping and controlling subjects⁶⁸. It is as previously mentioned not hierarchical but capillary as it proceeds in all directions at once⁶⁹. According to Foucauldian theory it is productive rather than oppressive

⁶⁷ Nietzsche Friedrich, *Daybreak*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §9.

⁶⁸ Gannon & Davies (2012) “Postmodern, Post-Structural and Critical Theories.” p. 113

⁶⁹ Foucault, Michel. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*. Brighton, UK: Harvester Press.

since it produces domination and subjection which creates motion⁷⁰. The way subjects create themselves are through these motions and within these power relations. Thus, they are not essential, or a priori, or capable escaping these relations but locate their existence within them. Moreover, within this notion of power and its knowledge productive force, there is no escape room to find oneself out of these discourses. Like in the question of what the apparatus of Church has created within the concept or gendered identity of God, the power is operationalised in the interconnections between subjects and institutions. However, only within discourses there are also possibilities for resistance and the positioning of new discourses⁷¹.

REFLEXIVITY

In contradiction, is how I would like to situate myself within academic research.

In contradiction, is how I would like to situate myself over faith and feminisms.

In contradiction, is how I would like to specify the important dialectical space between tensions that academia provides, and the fine line of accidentally stepping on toes of misrepresentation or unintentional justifications of not-so-niceness.

I played a systematic game of hide and seek throughout my youth, because I both belonged and did not fully belong to sides that were in tension to each other. Last year I still felt an unease in taking my partner to my favourite Sunday ritual, a Swedish Christian worship service. Perhaps it was inappropriate to take such a gender-non-conforming person with such an intimate connection with me to a binary, celestial, desexualised and heteronormative sacred safe haven. But although church gave me an uncomfortable feeling of having to hide some of the most important things in my life; my love, my sexual connections, and the form of those – this form of spirituality also set me, my emotions, my spirituality, free in a completely different way to what everything else did – which I, as a *fairly unsecular but persistently agnostic person with an adoration for the emotional and communitarian experience of Christianity*, value dearly. Although Swedish gender studies gave me the academic freedom of being in an appreciational space in regard to my queer love, political conviction and ventures, I also felt stuck in the prominent secularity, the calling-out-culture of thoughts that are *different and othered*, that I

⁷⁰ Gannon & Davies (2012) “Postmodern, Post-Structural and Critical Theories.” P. 84

⁷¹ Diamond, Irene, and Lee Quinby. “Foucault and feminism: Reflections on resistance.” (1988) p. 185

felt was dictating the rules of what one could and could not raise up one's hand for - or what would be laughed at, or screamed at for valuing. There was always something that I felt like I had to whisper around about. Through the process of this thesis I am also whispering my values, thoughts, arguments, articles, into my computer screen. And what feels whisperous is important to listen to.

Halfway through this thesis process I discuss the risk of posing academic claims on topics that carry a strong emotional force. Halfway, I also ask what exactly it is that I want to say, and perhaps more importantly, *why?* What is it that matters so much to me that I spend soon a year on thinking, writing, reading back and forth on these borderlands? In the spring before this summer, a question came to me by a fellow master's student: "*What does gender theory lose with having a secular norm?*" which sparked a lot of thoughts on credibility and the difficulty in writing about topics that create tension.

My colleague's question got me into a rickety state of thinking that I am stepping on the toes of what the *legacy of feminism* has meant for my existence. The risk of slipping into perpetuating oppression of feminist and LGBTQI+ subjects, the 'Godly' persecution of marginalised subject positions, is not anything that I want to perpetuate with the text, nor anything that I agree with in any form. Not to mention the violence, oppression and opposition that the far right, and also conservative Christian states, which have targeted marginalised, feminists and gender studies as a dangerous sphere to move in - a critical disrupting space, and it's a good one.

But there is something vital to gain in providing *space* for spirituality and religiosity within the gender studies discourse, and the question of "*What is at risk if no one is walking towards this tension?*" is what I am aiming to show with my research. And it is precisely to expand the critical disrupting space, *a cumbersome provocation*, before borders, forms and layers become rigid inside an institutionalised framework.

There is a stringent difference between harmful indoctrination of rigid values based on myths, and possibilities of an expansionary vision which can be traced in the feminisms that are for example posthumanist and decolonial, *and they need more space*. The question I am getting close to in my research is surely much smaller,

much more situated. But how do we know what our research will end up being used for? And should we stop ourselves just because we might be interpreted in a way that does not correspond to us?

So, the question remains, *what does gender studies lose on being secular?* perhaps it has a very subjective answer.

me.

with me also Anzaldua, Mother Theresa, Maria Magdalene, Yolanda Aurora Bohm Ramirez, Wollstonecraft, and countless borderlanders who no-one knows the name of – and what are they all but impressive prospects of political action, solidarity and equality, voice and hope.

It loses *potential* of inclusion, of being vast and explorative, of being critical, and also critical of what is inside. It loses what the field of *philosophy* has learnt so well, to create space of twisting and turning every possible truth, myth and untruth, also within its own tradition – to create knowledge out of hypertheorisation of our imagination, similar to that of speculate fiction - something that helps us with seeing a better possible future, or the reality of a horrible one. Truth lies in the process, not in the specifics. And something springs from that process, perhaps purpose, perhaps joy, confusion, perhaps brainy quotes, *perhaps the most important parts of your and my life*. Or perhaps misrepresented arguments that shape our existence to the worst – but then let us break them down again⁷². Originality and creativity come from freedom of speech and expression, and I want to create a freedom to ask tough questions – to create space for stands in the margins of theoretical discussions and to open the presupposed safe-spaces, regardless if they have ikons of Jesus or a vulva on the wall.

⁷² By us I mean those who happen to have the space to do so, not everyone does.

Method & material

Method

As mentioned in the background, the material I use comes from two feminist research magazines, *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap* and *Lambda Nordica*. I chose the two magazines, due to their prominence in the feminist research realm, and their situatedness in the Swedish respectively Nordic base. TGV is the Nordic region's largest peer-reviewed journal for current interdisciplinary gender research, and *Lambda Nordica*, is the oldest peer-reviewed open access journal of its kind, dedicated to interdisciplinary research in lesbian/gay/bi/trans* and queer studies. The interdisciplinary focus of the journals is vital for the questions I am posing in researching the magazines, and also their prominence in interdisciplinary gender research, and their aim of a vast audience of interest. The contemporality of the zines is critical in order to capture the Swedish and Nordic current debates and interests surrounding feminism. I have chosen to focus on the 21st century. Concerning *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap* (TGV), I have chosen to analyse the magazine through the years 2000 – 2019 in order to capture a twenty-year span of content and temporality. Concerning *Lambda Nordica*, I have chosen to focus on the last 10 years, 2010-2020, due to their change of focus in 2010. The change being, from their original focus from 1989 as a Swedish/Nordic cultural journal dedicated to homosexuality research and aimed at a broader audience in close collaboration with the LBT movements at the time, to in the past 10 years, being first and foremost an academic journal dedicated to interdisciplinary research in lesbian/gay/bi/trans* and queer studies.

To capture the vast and interdisciplinary Nordic gender studies discourse is an impossible task, but through these zines I expect to get and give an idea of what the current topics of interest are within gender studies, a space that I also as a gender studies master student inhabit. The zines could therefore be seen as a perhaps incomplete, but also an enticing and trending representation of both the feminist scholarship and the general academic activist's topics of feminism that the Nordic countries are facing.

For the sake of this study, I will address the findings as a mirror of the field I seek to study, but also wish to say that this is impossibly the most accurate mirror and representation of the field. I am also aware of that this mirror is also my personal mirror, fabricated through with and of the material that I have gathered throughout my academic and non-academic experiences and thoughts, and what I see inside this mirror is also an image of my own self and situatedness within the multiplicity of canons that I am operating through – a reflexivity that I will discuss further on the chapter thereof. Through this lens, I have tracked in what way religion, theology and spirituality is included, excluded and portrayed through the archives of the magazines. Although the method is of quantifiable quality, the depth of the analysis will lie in what and how the topics are presented and discussed, and not how many. This is due to the statistical void of explanatory power within this study; thus the statistical and numerical findings are a mere tool for making a deeper qualitative reflection possible.

Material:

I have analysed 60 issues from *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap (TGV)*, from 2000 – 2019, depicting 417 articles, free form elements, reviews and texts from both the Swedish Gender Researchers' Association and the editorial team of the magazine. I have focused primarily on coding the titles and abstracts in order to find out if religious and spiritual topics were included and how. In TGV the words, in different conjugations, captured within the titles and abstract were *religion, god, saints, veil/hijab, Islam/Muslim, Christian, holy, Pachamama*. From the 417 articles, 19 of them (4.6%) were coded to include spiritual or religious topics, where 10 of those came from one single issue in 2003 titled 'Gender and God'. Since 2010, 4 out of 238 (1.7%) were coded to have religious or spiritual content. The religious and spiritual topics addressed include reflections on masculinity, descriptions, historical thematic of for example female saints, ethnographies and reflections on lived religions, or religious symbols outside of the Nordic realm, or concerning peripheralized or marginalised religious subject positions concerning for example the hijab (depicted in three of the 19 articles). Also, topics surrounding the concept of God, gender identities, god through the female body, a gender-transcending

worship music analysis and the concept of women from a catholic perspective are present in TGV's magazines in single instances.

Here in TGV, in comparison to Lambda Nordica, the word theology was not found and operated upon – which in Lambda Nordica was the most prominent word within the religious content. In TGV there was also an article on with a Chicax autobiographical element, where religious topics did not take any space, which was then excluded from the religious topic code – and further, an article factors on the ecological and environmental politics and indigenous peoples in Bolivia (without a focus on religious or spiritual matters) titled 'Who is Marching for Pachamama?: An Intersectional Analysis of Environmental Struggles in Bolivia under the Government of Evo Morales', which was included from the coding of religious topics due to the stringent word choice of 'Pachamama', meaning mother earth as a goddess revered by the indigenous peoples of the Andes, or within the Inca tradition, a fertility goddess. Since each magazine issue has a particular topic, I have also noted and reflected upon issues where religious and spiritual topics are not included, for example 'Boundaries of gender studies' and 'the conditions of knowledge' within TGV or 'Postcolonial Queer Europe' and 'Queering histories and temporalities' within Lambda Nordica.

In Lambda Nordica I have analysed 263 articles, essays, editorials and reviews within 26 issues, where the religious and spiritual code words in different conjugations, captured within the titles and abstract were other than in TGV, namely *'theology, bible, Christian, faith, Muhammed, Jesus, Muslim/Islam, spiritual, sin'*. In Lambda Nordica, 12 of the contributions included such topics (4.9%). The focus on queering theology was particularly strong, and characterised many of the interventions, 5 of them were concerned with biblical interpretation and translations, further topics such as 'Christian faith, sexuality and the art of dying', 'Plato, Spiritual Marriage, and the Disruptive Potential of Queerness in August Strindberg's Giftas', 'On the 'theology', in the Muhammed caricatures and Ecce Homo's images of Jesus' and a review on 'Sin, sex and democracy: antigay rhetoric and the Christian right'.

Overview: Figures

Here I present the numerical and coded findings of the two journals that I researched. Here one can see in which year what amount of articles were published, how many of these that included some religious or spiritual topics in their title and further comments about how religion and spirituality is represented through the articles.

Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap

Year	Articles etc.	Including religion	Code for religious topics	Kommentar
2000	19	0		
2001	20	0		
2002	14	0		
2003	21	10	Issue with name "Gender and God"	Masculinity, otherness x2 (Senegal & Thailand), notion of
2004	14	2	Veil, female saints	
2005	19	1	Religion and Intersection	
2006	14	1	Christian Bodies	Feminist reinterpretation of body, flesh and spirit
2007	18	0		
2008	19	1	Masculinity and religious themes in 1920-films	Secularism, invisible spirituality, spiritual masculinity
2009	21	0		
2010	23	0	Indirectly Chicanx Autobiography (no mention)	Ignorance of place of religion
2011	20	0		
2012	19	1	Holy family - mentions religion briefly	Christian consequence in society
2013	28	0		
2014	19	0		
2015	13	0		
2016	40	1	"Pachamama"	Otherness + ignorance of meaning of religion
2017	26	1	Sports: gendernorms and religious freedom	Otherness
2018	32	0		
2019	18	1	Veil	Otherness
Tot	417	19		

73

Lambda Nordica

Year	Articles etc.	Including religion	Code for religious topics	Kommentar
2010	18	9	Queer Theology	3 biblical rewritings + Christian faith, sexuality and death + caricatures + intro to queer theology
2011	25			
2012	38			
2013	28	1	Representations	analysis of false translations of the bible
2014	28			
2015	30	1	Lambda Nordica 20 år	analysis of the importance of insightful bible interpretations
2016	20			
2017	30			
2018	25	1	Parenthesis in queer readings, reading the queer	Plato, Spiritual Marriage, and the Disruptive Potential of Queerness in August Strindberg's Giftas
2019	21			
Tot	263	12		

73 Commentary for 2003 TGV: Masculinity, otherness x2 (Senegal & Thailand), notion of God, masculine/feminine, gender identities, god through the female body, gender-trespassing worship song analysis, catholic concept of women

Analysis.

OVERVIEW AND POINTS OF DEPARTURE.

The analysis is focusing on the presupposition of an unbiased position of secularity. Through that I discuss the expression of the religious subject position and its value judgement in a secular context. Tensions within this system are arising between to hegemonically different value systems, such as faith and feminism. The analysis has four big brackets, which is also the running argument in the thesis.

Firstly, I will analyse the process of creating an intersectional analysis has included the famous triangle of gender, ethnicity and class but rarely classifies religion or religious proximity as an important aspect of intersectional theorising. This will lead to the insight on how religion often becomes a non-topic when it is not the direct object of discussion. Ethnicity, class and gender, are on the other hand, included in the intersectional theorising of topics where the religious identifications of subjects, or their relation or tension with religion, spirituality or secularity, is not being given importance.

Secondly, I will argue, with the findings from the feminist research magazines as well as the theoretical discourses of firstness's, that when religion is included within the gender studies discourse its often a matter of an othering process. This also takes its form in to see secularism as a firstness. I will explore this by analysing the notion of tradition and freedom within secular societies. Moreover, I will discuss if and in which way it may be void of religious or spiritual experiences, discussions and traces except for when othered, exotified, put in opposition or commercialised.

Thirdly, through the margins of feminist theory that concern religion and spirituality, the findings of the magazines, and with postcolonial inspiration, I orient towards tracing if and how an idea of a secularised and neutral Swedish society is presupposed in its hegemonial expressions of feminisms. I will come to the fractions of feminist debates in the periphery of the Swedish gender studies discourse that include a critical discussion on the dominant secularity and important crossroads between gender, religion and philosophy. As I write myself into those fractions, I will use their research to guide my argument to include the traces of religion in a

critical discussion within systematised intersectionality in the Swedish gender studies scholarship.

Fourthly, through engaging in the theoretical dialogue within Swedish feminist theory I explore one of the normalisations and firstnesses that has a strong hold in the cultural reproduction of history, and springs from supposedly the ‘strongest bastions of heteronormativity’⁷⁴ and gendered hierarchy - namely Christianity and as I will argue, *the gender of the Christian God*.

RELIGION: FEMINIST SELECTIVITY AND TENSION

Religious proximity as excluded from an intersectional analysis

Firstly, I will address the topic of the inclusion and exclusion of religion within the gender studies scholarship. In order to step into the topic of how religion is not being included, I will start from one of the articles in TGV by Erica Appelros, a Doctor of Theology and associate professor in the studies of faith and worldviews, who means that religious proximity should function as a variable in intersectional research⁷⁵.

Appelros questions in which way religion can function as a variable in an intersectional analysis. She introduces the concept of religious proximity to capture the placement of the individual in relation to religious authority and shows how gender and religiously bound expectation confine possibilities of women⁷⁶. Within her text she argues that there is a complexity within religion that involves intricate relations and rules between subjects and society. Further, that religious proximity reciprocates with gender in a way that grounds a wielding of power and oppression. She means that religion influences many social areas such as family, law, education, media, politics and economics in the contexts where they are allowed to do so. She thereby poses the complexity, continuity, austerity and hierarchy that is formed through religious institutions. However, this stringent connection between religion

⁷⁴ Ekström, Malin, and Peter Forsberg. "Tema: Queer teologi (förord)." *lambda nordica* 15, no. 1-2 (2010): 6-9. Retrieved from <https://lambdanordica.org/index.php/lambdanordica/article/view/277> (translated by me to English from Swedish)

⁷⁵ Appelros, Erica. "Religion och intersektionalitet." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 2-3 (2005): sid-69.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

and religious proximity, that infringe on lives with such a stronghold, is pushed into the private's sphere in secularised societies where religion is present either as a legacy or as a private undertaking. Appelros means that religion is outside of the scope when it is not the direct topic of analysis, other than for example gender, class or ethnicity which is often included by necessity in an intersectional analysis. The cruciality for the topic this thesis enacts presents itself through Appelros' intricate analysis of the absence of regarding religious proximity in an intersectional analysis. This presents a theory on how religious identifications and religious proximity become a question that is unspoken, moved to the private sphere, and as I argue, regarded an already othered topic which may not be included in academia where secularity is a firstness. Appelros' discussion on religion and intersectionality also portray the imagined reality of a dichotomy between religion and secularity, as well as, it unveils traditional religious structures that are still present in secularist traditions and the feminist subject within that. Her article works as a critical insight to the analysis of gender and religion in secularised societies such as Sweden, and marks one of the exemptions on the willingness to create space for the religious proximity to be noticed and reflected upon as well as reflected with.

Representation of religion in feminist research magazines.

We can see *that* topics of religion and spirituality are included in the magazines, and that within both magazines the way in which religion and spirituality and religion is represented has common trends, which will be discussed at a later stage of the analysis. The way in which religion is not included within the magazines is that it in most of the editions remains a non-topic. There is a lack of religious and spiritual topics in the articles, even in the magazines where issues of religion, spirituality or myths seem relevant, such as Postcolonial Queer Europe and queering histories and temporalities in Lambda Nordica, and the limits of gender studies, the stipulations of academia and the stipulation of knowledge in Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap (TGV).

Both of the magazines that I have researched do capture the crossroads between god and gender, where both produced one edition regarding religion and gender, named *God and Gender* in TGV and *Queer Theology* in Lambda Nordica.

In the forewords of both of those interventions, they describe the initial clash

between faith and feminism that the reader might face. What I mean by this is that the papers initially describe the tension, constructed dichotomy and oddity of combining faith and feminism. Examples on the tension between faith and feminism can be found precisely within the magazine articles where religion is included as either a central, or a peripheral topic. There the tension becomes clear due to the articles' positionality of being in between the two imagined realms. In *Lambda Nordica* the borderland is described in so far as 'sounding like an oxymoron', they write:

*“Queer theology? How are those related? Isn't theology a conservative discipline that should have long ago been adapted to the debris chamber of history along with the offensive statements of religious leaders that still serve as the breeding ground for discrimination, violence and oppression of LGBT people worldwide? In these times when the highest representatives of the world's most powerful religious community - the Roman Catholic Church - make statements that attempt to link homosexuality with paedophilia to darken their own scandals, is there any reason at all to care about theology? Is it not time instead to turn religion back once and for all? What for many may sound like an oxymoron - queer theology - is another answer to these questions. A queer attack from within on one of the strongest bastions of heteronormativity. A Trojan unicorn, bursting with subversive playfulness in all the colours of the rainbow, but always rooted in the deadly seriousness of marginalization. In a time that more and more voices are beginning to call postsecular, queer theology has a particularly important function to play as a counter-voice.”*⁷⁷

Through these insights we can explore the tension between the queer and the religious realm and also how a dichotomy has been built up between the two. Precisely this tension is what this thesis is written into in order to create possibilities at the crossroads between religion and feminism, to make the seemingly incompatible compatible through a fruitful and critical fusion.

The crossroads of faith and feminism and gender studies and theology do through

⁷⁷ Ekström, Malin, and Peter Forsberg. "Tema: Queer teologi (förord)." *lambda nordica* 15, no. 1-2 (2010): 6-9. Retrieved from <https://lambdanordica.org/index.php/lambdanordica/article/view/277> (translated by me to English from Swedish)

the topics of the zines, the lack thereof and the way in which they are written portray a tension. This tension is shown through either analyses that distance religion from gender studies through describing othered religions and feminist interventions thereof. Even in texts such as Cherrie Moraga's *From a long line of vendidas - Chicanas and feminism* or Anna Kaijser's *Who is Marching for Pachamama? An Intersectional Analysis of Environmental Struggles in Bolivia under the Government of Evo Morales* religion takes up no significant space. Religion in the Chicana experiences, or Pachamama, gets reduced to a signifier of nature only. Although some topics of religion are represented within the zine, the focus of such lie in the topic of theology *or* on minoritized religious, or religiously affected, groups – except for a few exceptions in TGV, on the identity and concept of God as well as discussions on masculine and feminine implications of a religious legacy. Clues to the tension between spirituality and expressions of gender identities can be found within an article published in *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap* in 2008 by Marie Nordberg and Magnus Mörck titled *Masculinity and religious thematic in the 1920-films*⁷⁸. The authors call upon theories by the historian Tommy Gustafsson, who describes the complex relation between masculinity and spirituality and how it has been made invisible within the research on the modern westernised society. The authors mean that the secular world and the religious world are more intertwined than we perceive them to be within the secularised Swedish context and that secularism influenced the interwar period but also simultaneously got influenced by religious world views. Through these insights he discusses the ambivalent masculinity within Swedish and American motion pictures of the 1920ies.

Further, the quote mentioned above also speaks to the potential that we can see in what other disciplines can win in including a postsecular queer voice in academic disciplines such as theology and religious studies, but also in history, economics and sociology⁷⁹. The dismantling of patriarchal and hierarchical power structures of past, future and present knowledge in order to shape critical discourses even if bound to a specific dogma, tradition, myth or culture. To write into these structures also means to inhabit space on both sides of the coin, this in order to understand the sphere that

⁷⁸ Nordberg, Marie, and Magnus Mörck. "I sekulariseringens skugga. Manlighet och religiös tematik i svensk och amerikansk 1920-talsfilm." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 3-4 (2008): sid-91.

⁷⁹ See the discussion including Silvia Federici in the analysis on the gender of God.

one criticises and to turn it from the inside, and not barricade the border between the sides through lifting solidarity on one side of the coin. To lift that discussion higher, a further historization of religion and academia is perhaps necessary to further the reason why critical theory, or gender studies discourses have distanced themselves from religious and spiritual projects, perhaps being bound in relation to imperialism, class dominance and patriarchal structures. An expression of that may be the anti-gender studies and anti-feminism discourse perpetuated by Christian conservatism in for example Poland. This shows the stringent need of gender studies theories and considerations to include themselves in religious scholarship. In this essay, I do however only briefly touch this important topic. Because my focus is in the opposite field, namely, if gender studies gains something through including religious and spiritual topics.

Disinterestedness from the side of hegemonic Swedish gender studies.

In both of the zines, the article published about God, religion or spirituality are written by a vast majority of theological scholars, with only few exceptions of professors of literature or social anthropology on othered societies. The prominence of theologians writing in gender studies magazines does indicate a lack of gender studies and critical studies scholars dealing with such topics. However, it does also indicate the more noticeable line of thought within theological and religious studies towards a feministic crossover – perhaps due to the secularisation of the public realm within the Scandinavian context, and the necessity of for example the church apparatus to incorporate a more liberal and ‘progressive’ way of defining themselves within the Scandinavian secularised space. The zines also present writings on the permissibility or history of the hijab as well as masculinities within the Christian realm. Although gender studies and feminist scholarship are transdisciplinary, and stretch their arms unto a wide scopes of academic fields, it is noteworthy that there is a significant difference between having studied years and years of theology and then specified in feminist theology, or having studied years and years of gender studies and then taking a path onto the realm of religion or spirituality.

With this section I want to show that there is a middle-ground, that faith and feminism gets constructed as sometimes standing in opposition and that it would be a simplification to dichotomise faith and feminism as something that cannot collide

or align.

The past chapter has been concerning the tension between religion and feminism from an analytical perspective and the selectivity of how religion is presented when mentioned in the context feminist research. This has been based on the findings from the given Nordic feminist journals. The main body of this section has been based on Appelros' analysis of how religious proximity is being structurally excluded from an intersectional analysis. Identity-shaping factors such as gender, ethnicity and class are included in such form of analysis and also regarded when the topic of question does not clearly address gender, ethnicity and class themselves. Here Appelros posed the claim that religious proximity is not handled in this way, which is essential for my argument of how religion is systematically *excluded* in the Swedish gender studies discourse. Henceforth, we will turn to how religion is *included* in the Swedish gender studies discourse and which effects that may have on subject positions outside of the dominant discourse, and the knowledge producing entity surrounding those.

THE OTHERED RELIGIOUS SUBJECT

The secular 'neutrality' and its connection to the religious other

In *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap* the edition on gender and god is manufactured with a project of which the process-name was 'To write *against* tradition', which alludes to a critical approach to the universalism that religion sometimes constitutes. The idea of writing *against* tradition within the context of gender and religion hinges onto both the dichotomy of gender and religion, and the tensions thereof.

Michel Foucault, and in his footsteps also the postmodern feminist scholarship perhaps led by Judith Butler, criticise tradition in such a way that their theories radically challenge all thinking that situates itself in the context of tradition, since it relativizes and criticises traditional forms of continuity⁸⁰. For example, it challenges the Christian theological commonplace that lives out of the continuity of the event and personification of Jesus Christ. Thus, the postmodern, including the dominant

⁸⁰ Foucault, "Powers and Strategies," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 142-145

critical and feminist scholarship in the Scandinavian context puts up a critique of continuity and calls into question the very credibility of tradition⁸¹. Such a statement may seem completely justifiable and vital in order to dismantle hierarchical and oppressive structures and my aim is not to state that it is not. It is a vital tool for such possibilities and is a critical instrument to shake the common myths that society somewhat depends on. My concern is of a different sort. Critique of what is defined as tradition is indeed one way of provoking change, but it is also tool for creating a hierarchy between the critical and feminist enlightened non-traditional way of creating knowledge and decreases thereby the credibility of various other alternatives to how one creates knowledge. By this, I mean that the critique of tradition sometimes legitimises the view on the very criticiser of tradition has been put in a neutral, albeit situated, position. The Swedish gender studies scholars Linda Berg, Mikaela Lundahl and Lena Martinsson similarly point out that the tradition which colours the ‘anti-tradition critique’ simultaneously makes secularism, amongst other firstnesses, into a neutral and objective space, which is counterintuitive to what the anti-tradition theories aim towards in the first place⁸². The scholars explain this through claiming that positing religion as the *other* simultaneously makes secularism what they call a ‘firstness’. This firstness is characterised through that secularism gets embodied and reproduced as an objective and neutral space.

The religious other.

Berg, Lundahl and Martinsson present the secular subject as often represented as free and rational in contrast to an imagined religious, traditional, and often Muslim other⁸³. The firstness is thus a notion that reproduces secular ideals through its neutral position from which religious expressions can be judged and criticized. The veil of one’s own position, when operating precisely in the secularised space of the gender studies scholarship in Sweden, is not only affecting the outsiders of this particular position, but also simultaneously effecting the context in one operates in from within this position. The structural othering of the religious subject does also

⁸¹ Byrne, James M. (1992). Foucault On Continuity: The Postmodern Challenge To Tradition. *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*, 9(3), 4.

⁸² Berg, Linda, Mikela Lundahl, and Lena Martinsson. "Sekularitet-förstahet genom religion och kön." *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 4 (2016). (4): 7-9

⁸³ Ibid. 7

spring from this secular firstness, which the Swedish scholars argue on the basis of Asad's theories. They claim that the secular subject, which also overflows to the feminist subject of the academic knowledge production in the secularised Sweden, as often represented as free and rational in contrast to an imagined religious, traditional, and often Muslim other⁸⁴.

In an TGV article on 'The Holy Family' in 2012, one of their few articles including a religious theme in the last decade, we can see an argument on how the Christian 'atmosphere', as the author calls it, "strongly linger and exhale its anxiety in the closed family sphere"⁸⁵ (my translation). These types of interventions are a need in order to dismantle religious dogmatic chains and norms, but also expresses a certain unwillingness to discuss religion in anything but a negative eyeing. One can also see brief comments on the tension between religion and gender topics in an article in 2017 on Sports classes in the Swedish context and the traditional gender norms and religious freedom through facing the legislating institution of education and its tension with religious students. The article presents a case where a report to the national organ of education in Sweden (Skolverket) posed that it was incompatible for girls to wear religious clothing, in this case the hijab, in Sports class, and also pinpointed that the gender separation in the Sports class was incompatible with the school's goal of 'counteracting traditional gender patterns'. Through this I am not claiming that for example counteracting traditional gender patterns is wrong, but I am presenting this in order to show that there is a tension between religious and feminist topics that is also expressed in societal institutions such as education and family.

The articles that include religion or spirituality within the journals do consider topics that consider either subjects or cultures that have become *othered*. In creating a separation between the ideal of a norm-critical atmosphere, which is in itself a stringent and necessary goal, there is also a downside of not always drawing the discussion from a validated subject position of the *other*. By this I mean that the peripheral topics and subject positions, stay precisely in the periphery, whereas the central topics and subject positions stay in the centrality of the discourse. Since

⁸⁴ Ibid. 7

⁸⁵ Backberger, Barbro, Margareta Bäck-Wiklund, Elisabeth Hjorth, Pia Laskar, Lars Raattamaa, and Johanna Langhorst. "Den heliga familjen." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 4 (2012).

decentralising the centre is a vital prospect for change and realisation about norms, hierarchies and oppression, it becomes vital to also dismantle the hegemonic feminist discourse. This, in order to open a discussion that focuses on the inclusion of a critical perspective.

Within the issues on gender and god within the two zines, we find mostly discussions on *otherness* through presenting articles on a cult in Senegal, female Buddhist nuns in Thailand and caricatures of Muhammed. With this I mean that the research on religious topics in a secular context are about *other* contexts than their own. These are descriptions, stories and arguments that are depictions of other peoples, cultures and contexts presented as something outside of their own Swedish or Nordic context that is interesting within the topics of gender and god.

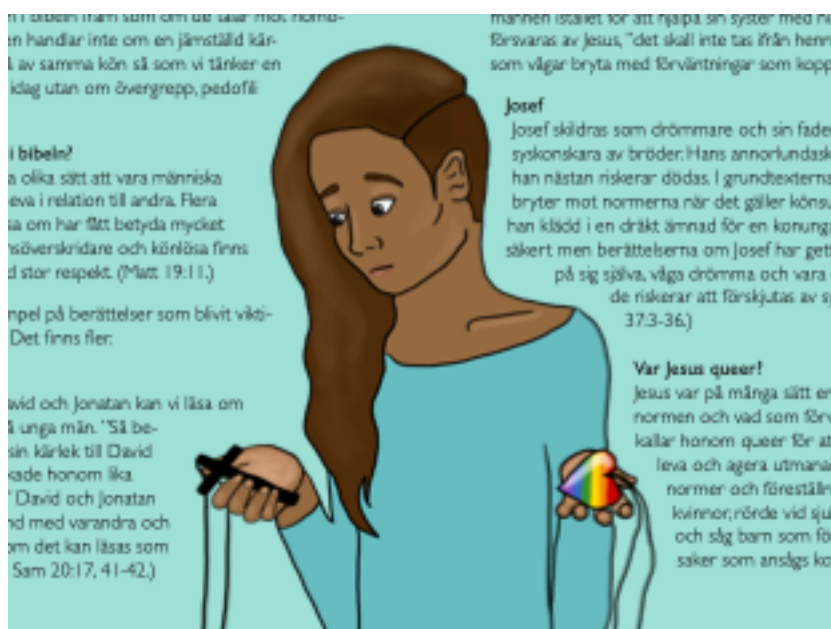
The past chapter has concerned the construct of the othered religious subject. Firstly, I have outlaid the secular neutrality that I claim to be operating within Swedish feminist research, which is an analytical continuance of the section on secularity as a non-tradition in the theoretical framework. Secondly, I have claimed that this makes secularity into a neutralised position, which creates a religious ‘unfree’ other that is not represented, as well as, is being held from being represented at the centre of knowledge production. Throughout this chapter I have used the findings of the two feminist research journals in order to construct my argument. Henceforth, I will turn to the crossroads of god and gender, where I discuss the borderland between feminism and religion in the form of theology and then turn to a significant topic that stands at the margins of both the magazines and the analytical discourse surrounding the borderlands – namely the gender of God. The relevance of this in my analysis comes through the concept of firstnesses, which I apply to perhaps the strongest hold of a hierarchal order in current times, and that with a holy figure at the top that has been constructed as masculine.

IF GOD IS NOT DEAD IN FEMINIST RESEARCH, THEN WHAT IS GOD?

Bridging the gap – a narrative of Swedish Christian Queers.

As the Church of Sweden laid out their survival brochure for Christian Queer teens, they pinpoint a specific and situated group of people within those crossroads. They

describe that, in the Scandinavian setting, being both within the religious or spiritual and the feminist or LGBTQI+ realm, means to come out in two worlds⁸⁶. Meaning, that both religious and LGBTQI+ realms are facing marginalisation within the Swedish society, and not only that, but also stand in tension against each other.



(Part of the rainbow-brochure by the Church of Sweden⁸⁷)

The brochure, which was mainly fabricated as a survival guide and an uplifting read to young queer Christians in Sweden, does speak into the figure Gloria Anzaldúa names 'Nepantla'. Anzaldúa addresses an intersectional identity that bridges at least two dominions outside of the mainstream societal discourse, which in this context are both examples of breakouts from the norm of the current Swedish society. This nepantla is an example of bridging something that in many contexts is seen as extremely problematic, a provocation of sorts, in both faith and feminism. The intersection of faith and feminism is a niche on both ends, meaning that they represent two small, but diverse and complex, marginalised groups of society, which are also standing in opposition through the gaze of the commons.

Nevertheless, in the Mestizx and Chicax writings, we can see examples of bridging

⁸⁶ Redner, Cecilia, *Under regnbågen står du inte ensam, överlevnadsguide för queerkids*. Svenska Kyrkan Västerås Stift. 2020

⁸⁷ Ibid. For further interest, the brochure was downloaded at the latest 23.05.2020 from <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/Broschyr%20HBTQ%20A3%20Vik.pdf>

the gap through embodying faith and feminism as an act of both identity and resistance, a resistance that pushes and pulls the boundaries within an intersectionally complex borderland. Their discussions from the constructed borders of society are therefore necessitated by bridging two or more forms of identity that are often unbridgeable in a normative discourse⁸⁸.

There is a dualistic break of identity waiting to be healed.

To bridge the gap between two discourses, such as religion and gender studies is not a matter of puzzling over its borderland but through healing the split between the two. In Chicana and Mestiza writing, this has become a tool in order to make sense of home, identity and structures, in a way that breaks both the Eurocentric order and the boundaries between theology and gender studies. The necessity of the postsecular turn that I find necessary within the gender studies scholarship is the demand of an interestedness in postcolonial critique where religion and spirituality is not neglected or spoken about from an outsider perspective but held as important tools of knowledge producing resources. The hegemonic secular feminism has taken over the gender studies scholarship, and although there are prominent scholars of black feminist scholarship, indigenous feminism etc., religious and spiritual matters within gender studies is still, or again, a very niched area of study that complies and is situated within a secular norm. To break the Eurocentric secular trend within academia it would be necessary to study the role of religion not only from those within the secular systematic realm, but those voices who work, live and breathe through a religious or spiritual lens of existence. Although, the split between the secular and religious, and many other binaries, is a constructed dualistic binary that works as a control mechanism between oppressors and suppressed, it becomes crucial to deconstruct the very essence of that split, and those whose voices have been silenced through it. Anzaldúa writes;

“The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long

⁸⁸ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/la frontera*. Vol. 3. San Francisco: aunt lute books, 1987.

*struggle, but one that could in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.”*⁸⁹

The persistent endeavour of creating oneself as an alignment of opposite qualities within is something that becomes particularly clear for a Mestizx. In this way, the inhabitant of the borderland, the Nepantla, becomes an embodiment of the project of breaking dualities, not only for identifications, but also in academia. The intoxication of an absolute despot duality creates a strawman of only being able to be one or the other, not both nor neither. A Nepantla, then becomes a productive potential of breaking binaries, systems and hierarchies both within and outside of academia. The breaking of mainstream knowledge production into something vaster and more including, is therefore undoubtedly going to emerge from the borderland itself. Only the Nepantla can communicate on both sides across the borders from the inside. And if the borderlands do not have voices, it is going to be extremely hard to stomp into the opposing lands that they are bordering, in order to dismantle its dividing figures.

Appellos, who wrote on the inclusion of religious proximity in TGV, which we discussed previously, writes into the borderlands of different scopes of identification by raising questions on identities that stand in the borderland between two worlds. She writes, translated by me:

*“.. self-incarnating is an incoherent concept – female spiritual leaders - naturally leads to paradoxes. The advantage of being, so to speak, outside of the fundamental gender system is that one is able to break against it without penalty. However, the disadvantages of being outside the fundamental gender system are that, since one is not within the conceptual framework of the system, one cannot influence the system either.”*⁹⁰

Further, she means that it also applies to the Western fundamentalist characterised woman, who lives a more secular society. There the tension between religious and non-religious contexts become clearer. She switches between being almost-woman-almost-man in certain areas of religion (when quietly exercising leadership), being a

⁸⁹ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/la frontera*. Vol. 3. San Francisco: aunt lute books, 1987. p. 57

⁹⁰ Appellos, Erica. "Religion och intersektionalitet." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 2-3 (2005): sid-69.

woman like that as a woman is defined by religion (when she is a good wife), as well as being a woman defined in the secular society (when she an equal professional worker). To deal with this tension on the psychological level can be done in different ways, she means. For example, the woman can assume a divided identity where she and more or less successful results alternate between different gender schemes depending on context, one being a phenomenon similar to the code-shifting that genuinely multilingual people carry out when they move cross the language boundaries, a notion that also subverts Chicana feminist writing as an inhabitant of the borderlands who can change dynamics through both belonging and non-belonging on both sides.

Comingling with spirituality.

Writing theory from mestiza knowledge and consciousness also discloses the transcultural experiences of those living in between different worlds of meaning. This is particularly important for the one-sided 'westernised' academic source of knowledge production. The bridge between religion or spirituality and gender studies or feminism, is a bridging of worlds that are now not considered within academia. Well stated in the Feminist Philosophy Reader they argue that;

*"The so-called "real world" and the spirit world comingle in Anzaldúa's ontologies, and her perspective challenges the dualistic thinking and love of purity at the heart of traditional Anglo thinking about categories and identities."*⁹¹

Exactly the comingling, the interest of both and more, is what can trigger a more vast knowledge-producing entity. It presents a decolonial critique of how we produce knowledge. And calls upon the fact that non-secular knowledge often gets labelled as non-academic literature instead of academic writing. What becomes important, in order to include such statements and forms within academia, is the incorporation of a post-secular academic structure.

⁹¹ Bailey, Alison, and Chris Cuomo. *Feminist Ontologies*, within "The feminist philosophy reader." 2008. P. 795

The aim of analytical structures that are aiming to be postpatriarchal, postcolonial and postsecular.

Postsecularism is necessary for an expansion of how and where to produce knowledge that gets heard. To recognise the importance of the effort of postsecular feminism is to think beyond the limits of Eurocentric imagination. It also carries an emancipatory possibility from the situatedness of marginalised groups, and their view of the world and the systems incorporated in it. Progress is often defined as secular, but if one would hold this view, one would also mean that the westernised way of creating growth and knowledge is the only type of way that brings the world forwards. The postsecular turn challenges westernised thought processes in philosophy, theology and gender studies because it creates a possibility for that subjectivity and the knowledge it produces can be delivered through and sustained by religious virtue as well as spirituality. Thus, there is a return of religion in the secular world that is necessary in order to embrace cultures and communities, and that return needs to be critical, and needs to be discussed critically. Francesca Parmeggiani states, based on the theory of Gianni Vattimo, that the religious experience is not a return by its essential nature but given the conditions of existence in modernity. A modernity defined by ‘the Christian West, secularized modernity, a fin-de-siècle state of anxiety over the impending threats of new apocalyptic dangers’⁹². He continues;

*“In religion something that we had though irrevocably forgotten is made present again, a dormant trace is reawakened, a wound re-opened, the repressed returns and what we took to be an Überwindung (overcoming, realization and thus a setting aside) is no more than a Verwindung, a long convalescence that has once again to come to terms with the indelible trace of its sickness... The return may be an (or the) essential aspect of religious experience itself.”*⁹³

What Vattimo describes here is a desire and a conviction of that this era is the end of structural hierarchical systems based on illicit grounds. In his view, the sacredness

⁹²Parmeggiani, Francesca. (2011). Speaking of God: the post-secular challenge for Italian feminist thought and practices. *Annali d'Italianistica*, 29, 417-430.

⁹³ Ibid.

of existence and thinking is hiding within something that we have forgotten, but that will return. Thus, the post secular era is near and desired on many crucial levels, but for the purpose of this text, also for knowledge production. The idea of religion returning to society and knowledge production is situated in the westernised secular society. Thus, that return is not only desired as the western society itself turns postsecular, if it does, but also in order to legitimise certain forms of knowledge production, convictions and societal structures that are now facing a status of a minority. The return of religion is therefore a form of making peoples, and societies, known as ‘the Other’ accepted, and accepted in and through producing knowledge; an important aim in with when a far-right storm is blowing through Europe. The meeting between religion and gender studies therefore needs to become a postsecular critical engagement in order to escape Eurocentric knowledge production, othering and the systematic supremacy of a veiled white western and masculine gaze.

Religious legacy of the masculinisation of the Christian God.

On another side the initial quote from Lambda Nordica’s editions on god and gender lifts up the stringency to critically view the field of theology with a gender studies lens in order to foster “*a queer attack from within on one of the strongest bastions of heteronormativity*”. This significant side of why interdisciplinary gender studies discourses need to confront and dare dominant and hierarchical discourses that steer the social institutions of the planet. Following the content of the magazines, one can see that there are critical writings on gender identities and the concept of God, most prominently in TGV, These are highly valuable examples of an intervention within the gender studies discourse that considers a mainly philosophical and analytical analysis of the in-between-worlds of gender and god. Within the religious texts Lambda Nordica presents there is not such a focus, but instead a focus of queer theology. Thus, common topics are interpretations of the bible as well as two introductory writings to queer theology. The articles in Lambda Nordica and TGV are related to topics such as: *the concept of God, the gender identity of God, queer theological insights and reflection on the politicisation of the name of God, God’s identities, gender incarnations in the church sphere and God through the women’s body*. Through these articles there is a questioning of the highest being with highest authority as masculine and where this gendered identity and pronoun of God is a

patriarchal firstness or normalisation that can be criticised without dismissing the fundamentals of the doctrine of Christian faith.

In TGV's issue on god and gender, Anne-Louise Eriksson, a researcher at the institution of research and culture of the Church of Sweden, means that feminist theologians in Sweden so far have paid a lot of attention to what has been going on in the physical room of the Christian institution. Through stressing the importance of attention also for what goes on in the non-physical rooms of church, which on one end means a feminist theological re-construction of the "divine room" understood as the faith and teachings of the church⁹⁴.

To continue with an example of religious forms that have formed our societies and how specific problematic notions has been hidden under the veil of naturalness, I will now consider the masculinisation of the Christian God. It is overwhelmingly interesting to see how dominant structures hide under their own wings, like we have just seen within the masculine representation of the divine within the Christian doctrine and the corresponding arguments that will be presented in the next chapter. That means that dominant discourses, such as a patriarchal structure and the Christian masculine image of God, is both visible and invisible simultaneously. Stephen Moore, a professor in New Testament Studies, describes this phenomenon through what masculinity has to do with biblical studies. He precisely states that it is almost nothing and nearly everything. That masculinity is once everywhere and nowhere. What he describes is an epistemological veiling of the marked nature of hegemonic, mostly heterosexual male-gendered experiences. He means that "We hide behind an omnipresent visibility – a visibility taken for granted to such a degree by society and scholarship that it becomes virtually invisible". The normative body, and with that any normative form for example how we produce knowledge in academia, averts being gazed at, and studied as a problematic body. It is merely a system running, without people paying attention to which assumptions and tools it rests upon. Similarly, within the Christian doctrine, the sex and gender of God remains unmarked. Although even the Catholic Church claims that God does not have a gender, the omnipresent visibility that is attributed to God, is male. Biblical

⁹⁴ Eriksson, Anne-Louise. "Genusinkarnationer i kyrkans rum. En könad o-ordning." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 3-4 (2003): 15-24

interpretation is thus a veiled project of men, by men, and something that for men, was the normative model for most of the history of the biblical texts and most importantly, also of biblical criticism⁹⁵. Likewise, the veiled and unmarked masculine and Eurocentric body of knowledge production, and with that the patriarchal system, is built upon the assumption that a normative body is ‘a text which will reject all attempts by other normatively fitting bodies to read it’⁹⁶. Hence, a matter normalised, veiled and left uncriticised. Consequently, and perhaps most importantly, this infiltrates itself in a vast amount of areas. A statement of the bible studies scholar Stephen Moore quoted by Björn Krondorfer discusses the topic:

*“a non-absent male body is also man’s blindness toward a body’s textual transformation into law, social institutions, normative discourse, cultural customs, artistic expressions and so forth”.*⁹⁷

In this way, systemic interventions become a non-topic, hence invisible in knowledge production. Thus, what we read, hear and see becomes a filtered version of reality and knowledge coloured in white secular and masculine supremacy. To create critical discussions around and within the crossovers of such subjects, as attempted within the scope of this text, is an endeavour to dismantle systemised power and control, when lying in hands marked with coloniality.

Secular scholarship is a veiled mask of neutrality. However, what secular scholarship considers very little is its own secular agenda, and how it deliberately diminishes other forms of how to see, read, hear, feel and write about the world. The problematic aspect of such secular prominence is that with the secular twang of the ‘western’ world, the other real and possible worlds outside of the secular realm, become devaluated and disregarded in mainstream academia. To bridge the discourse of theology and gender studies, is therefore also a project of embracing the ‘traditional’ within theology and the ‘progressive’ in the secular, something that causes a cultural collision, un choque. In Anzaldúa’s words;

⁹⁵ Haddox, Susan. E. (2016). Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades. *Currents in Biblical Research*, 14(2), 176-206.

⁹⁶ Krondorfer, Björn. (2018). God’s Hinder Parts and Masculinity’s Troubled Fragmentations: Trajectories of ‘Critical Men’s Studies in Religion’. *Religion in der Gesellschaft*, 287.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

“Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incomparable frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision.”⁹⁸

This bridge does not only dismantle a narrative of oppressive and hierarchical structures but opens and widens the possibilities of academic knowledge production. It also creates a scope for including art, culture, activism and spiritual practices as potential knowledge producing entities. Something that is disregarded in secularised, anti-religious and anti-spiritual secular discourses.

God is made man - and man is made God.

In order to exemplify the postsecular need in academia, one needs to be able to critically question underlying motors of religious institution that still bind society. Through discussing how God becomes man and man becomes God I will outlay an example of veiled masculine supremacy and the perpetuation of a system where the masculine is the highest in the hierarchy. Dismantling discourses of power and knowledge within religious institutions and practices then works as a tool for then viewing how the normative components within knowledge production need to be questioned and unveiled.

This section works on the crevices of dominant discourses through first presenting the use of grammatical pronouns in the bible in order to subsume the anthropomorphising of God and the Spinozian criticism thereof. Further, it will create a discussion surrounding not only the anthropomorphising of the Christian God, but also the andropomorphising i.e. the masculinisation of the representation of God through analogies, pronouns and otherwise gendering God masculine. Through that it will lead onto the realisation of the systematic veiling of the feminine attributions of gender on the Holy Spirit in the Hebrew language, and the representation of femininity in the bible – as well as the systematic veiling of the

⁹⁸ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/la frontera*. Vol. 3. San Francisco: aunt lute books, 1987. p. 121

prominence of masculinity. Contrasting it to major systems that govern society, such as capitalism I will present the discussion surrounding the gender of the Christian God as detrimental through how we shape histories. Through arguing for application of the gender-neutral pronoun ‘they’ of the Christian God I will briefly present views of other feminist Christian theologians and criticise the way in which they lay out the fear of a polytheistic clang if using the pronoun ‘they’ for God. That criticism will include a decolonial perspective on the construction of the monotheistic and polytheistic binary. Finally, I will with the help of the outland criticism, claim that the most suitable pronoun of God is ‘they’, and that the gendering of the Christian God should consist in both an ungendering of them, but with a vaster form of analogical expression of masculinities and femininities in order to systematically oppose the patriarchal system.

In the beginning, God created, is the first sentence in the Bible. A God that later gets described as indescribable, uncontainable, all-powerful and untameable, thus, the clarity of the Godly being persists in purposeful ambiguousness. Although, this particularly clear idea of that we cannot be clear about an omnipresent divine being, the language, i.e. gender, pronouns, analogies and metaphors surrounding God create an idea about which exact constructs one binds the concept of God to in the conventional tradition of faith. ‘In the beginning God created’, and the verb created attributes to a masculine singular subject. The word God, translated from *Elohim* in Hebrew, refers to a being with any or no gender and is plural. Furthermore, the word *Elohim* is being used in *1 Kings 11: 31 - 33* in order to refer to a set of different possibilities of gendered subjects. In the book of the Kings, *Elohim* is used both to refer to the Christian God, as well as, other Gods (in plural), and Goddesses. Thus here, the actual gender attributions of God are specified through the verbs surrounding the subjects, not the subject of God itself⁹⁹. Likewise, in sentences such as ‘*and God said*’, where the word ‘said’ describes a masculine gender subject. Further, the attribution of the masculine gender in Hebrew is widely used due to its standardised custom of the masculine gender as the generic gender¹⁰⁰. Hence,

⁹⁹ Brenner, Athalya.. (2002). The Hebrew God and his female complements. In *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies* (pp. 72-87). Routledge.

¹⁰⁰ Khan, Geoffrey, Shmuel Bolozky, Steven Ellis Fassberg, Gary Rendsburg, Aaron D. Rubin, Ora Schwarzwald, and Tamar Zewi, eds. *Encyclopedia of Hebrew language and linguistics*. Leiden: Brill, 2013. p. 581

perhaps solely to capitulate to the grammatical structure and not to establish the gender of God as masculine per sé.

A scholar of liturgical language, Gail Ramshaw, discusses the grammatically masculine and criticises the masculine as generic. In her work *God beyond gender: feminist Christian God-language*, she argues that the masculine attribution of God as generic, and the argument that it serves theological speech well, is something that she finds utterly outdated due to that generic interpretation yields androcentrism through the power relations that language creates¹⁰¹. Furthermore, she means that the masculine gender attribution to God either signifies actual male sexuality in God or a divine androcentrism. Thus, either one could argue that a solely masculine attribution to God minimises God to a being with a human body and human attributions of what we call sex, or that the masculine gender attribution serves a divine androcentrism with consequences that may lead to particularly patriarchal worldview, where the notion of man and masculinity is superior to other genders and attributes of gender. If the latter is necessary for the theological doctrine and knowledge production, there would be a problem. However, the few feminist theology scholars as well as other prominent philosophers in language, knowledge production, metaphysics, and theology, argue that God ought not to be gendered masculine, due to several different reasons, yielding anthropomorphism or a misconception of the essence of the highest being. Ramshaw presents Qui Est (The one who is), following the Yahweh (I am), as the most appropriate name for God since it doesn't attribute God to any particular form – an argument that I will further discuss in the next paragraph.

Already in presocratic philosophy around 500 years BC, with for example Xenophanes in Greek philosophy¹⁰², but also the famous early thinkers of the Enlightenment - and the philosopher Spinoza - rejected any anthropomorphizing of God. God was for him more bound to abstract principles of knowledge, which was bound to knowing 'Nature'¹⁰³. Spinoza meant that the tendency to attribute human

¹⁰¹ Ramshaw, Gail. *God beyond gender: feminist Christian God-language*. Fortress Press, 1995. p. 25

¹⁰² Sheridan, Mark. *Language for God in Patristic Tradition: Wrestling with Biblical Anthropomorphism*. InterVarsity Press, 2015.

¹⁰³ Krondorfer, Björn. (2018). God's Hinder Parts and Masculinity's Troubled Fragmentations: Trajectories of 'Critical Men's Studies in Religion'. *RELIGION IN DER GESELLSCHAFT*, 283.

traits to God can be explained by ‘people’s natural inclination toward religious superstition’, as mentioned by the professor of Religious Studies Björn Krondorfer. Quoting Spinoza, he writes “Those who feign a God, like man, consisting of a body and a mind, and subject to passions... how far they have wandered from the true knowledge of God.”¹⁰⁴. And Krondorfer argues, that even if God would have a body, the concealment of it might give us a hint towards why the gender and sex of God is ambiguous. In *Ex 33:21-23* the bible tells a story about how Moses cannot see God’s face. ‘I will shield your vision with My hand. then you will only see My back’. It begs the question on what it is that is being protected, veiled and hidden. Krondorfer asks the question of whether it is possible that what is hidden, is God’s genitals¹⁰⁵. This theory put forward by Eilberg-Schwartz, as well as, Spinoza’s criticism of the anthropomorphising of God, propose an interpretation of the Bible which deliberately veils the possibility of God’s sexed body and gender, regardless if God has them or not, due to precisely not fixing the Godly being to a specific form. This hinges unto a larger epistemological complexity that stalemates the critical inquiry of men and masculinities in religion¹⁰⁶. The presumed maleness of the possible divine body and masculinity of the divine gender is presupposed by possible patriarchal bias.

God as he, she, they, or eternity?

God in the physical space in church, Eriksson writes, has historically been assigned both masculine/feminine gender and culturally produced masculinity and femininity. However, she also discusses the anthropomorphic and andromorphic images, analogies and stories about God, as well as, that God has been constructed with a masculine pronoun and that church attendees ritually ‘practice’ a gendered or sexed order, where the masculine is hierarchically higher placed than the feminine. This takes its form both in the way roles within the church are traditionally constituted, and that a ‘masculine’ God rules over a ‘feminine’, or ‘feminised’ humanity¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Panay (Hebrew) is being used in the translation as God’s face, however panay stands in parallel construction to ahoray (God’s back side). Thus, in the theory they claim that the front side would reveal gendered markers whilst the back side might not. (Theory by Eilberg-Schwartz, presented in Krondorfer p. 283-85)

¹⁰⁶ Krondorfer, Björn. (2018). God’s Hinder Parts and Masculinity’s Troubled Fragmentations: Trajectories of ‘Critical Men’s Studies in Religion’. *RELIGION IN DER GESELLSCHAFT*, 286.

¹⁰⁷ Eriksson, Anne-Louise. "Genusinkarnationer i kyrkans rum. En könad o-ordning." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 3-4 (2003): 15-24

As Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies Susan Haddox phrases its contextual interpretative force, “biblical interpretation of men, by men, and for men, was the normative mode for most of the history of the biblical texts and of biblical criticism”¹⁰⁸. Masculinity is lingering in the presupposed image of God through the interpretative force whose origin goes back (and forth and back again) to a narration of masculine coded bodies that have interpreted and coded history as we know it. Since the knowledge production concerning theological texts and bible adaptations has precisely been made by men and for men, it makes it very possible that a masculine bias is lingering in the scriptures and the interpretations of them. Similarly, Silvia Federici, a feminist activist, and a renowned political theorist, works through a historical analysis of capitalism, the very basis of capitalism rests on the persistent exploitation of women, the pervasion of desiring a full-employment and an exponentially growing labour force. Her feminist-marxist analysis portrays an analysis of the visible invisibility of capitalism and its presumed injustices as necessities throughout history, in a similar way to how we could historify the masculine invisible, but visible prominence of masculinity in the church apparatus and its widely held authority and repressiveness of otherness and womanhood. The problem of the veiled capitalism and its ‘invisible hand’ and its exploitative forces that necessitate the system itself, is parallel to how faith has drawn on favouring the masculine in society in order to control women¹⁰⁹.

Nevertheless, Krondorfer states, that there is not a single literary attempt among the texts that he addressed to problematise or deny the visual constraint of imagining God as masculine. It is a persistent lack of research in the critical history of religion. Previously, presumably due to the prominent uncovered masculine domination of historical and academical knowledge production. And currently, from a feminist and secular perspective, due to the disinterestedness to criticise something within a dominant system that has lost its presence in what we call the white western tradition. The andropomorphisation of God, following the construct of masculinity

¹⁰⁸ Haddox, Susan. E. (2016). Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades. *Currents in Biblical Research*, 14(2), 176-206.

¹⁰⁹ Federici, Silvia (2004) *Caliban and the Witch*. New York: Autonomedia. p 31, 63, 239

in an ambiguous divine being, constructs masculinity as at the same time having no place and all place in religious contexts. Like Federici means with capitalism, and like every dominant and unquestioned systemic movement, masculinity and the presupposed masculinity of God, remains an unmarked experience, in both religious and gender studies, and the ordinary Christian as well as unchristian life. It remains an unmarked experience that is embedded in everything that it touches. Krondorfer writes ‘We hide behind an omnipresent visibility – a visibility taken for granted to such a degree by society and scholarship that it becomes virtually invisible.’¹¹⁰ And there lies the stringent emergency and problematic timelessness of this construct and its complicated and unclear implications. Therefore, the anthropomorphisation of God and its anti-emancipatory problems is also accompanied by the andropomorphisation of God and its invisible visibility. Like the normative male body and its subtle escape of being gazed at and studies as problematic, God as masculine also becomes something unstudied, unquestioned and normal.

In Christianity itself, this may come from the incarnation of God in Jesus, which is a human gendered masculine. And that God as a consequence of not only, but also this line of argument, would be masculine. To discuss this briefly, there is one theory on that the exaltation of Jesus means that one, as mentioned in the Revelations, become genderless when risen to the heavens. Thus, Jesus was gendered masculine on earth, but could then be seen as genderless, alongside a genderless God and trinity in the skies. Further, many theologians during the first centuries after the birth of Jesus equalise Jesus with God’s wisdom. However, this wisdom is described with the name Sophia in the Old Testament. In that way Jesus was being gendered feminine through *her* equalisation with Sophia before the incarnation – if one would follow the logic of the early theologian’s connection between Jesus and Sophia¹¹¹. Perhaps Jesus is thus a transgressor, both in gender as well as with life/death itself.

And, going back to the insights of Krondorfer; just as Moses was not able to see and read the face of God or, put differently, the front side of God’s body, men in hegemonic positions are unable and often unwilling to see and read their own

¹¹⁰ Krondorfer, Björn. (2018). God’s Hinder Parts and Masculinity’s Troubled Fragmentations: Trajectories of ‘Critical Men’s Studies in Religion’. *RELIGION IN DER GESELLSCHAFT*, 287.

¹¹¹ Nortjé-Meyer, Lilly. "Early Church Understandings of Jesus as the Female Divine: The Scandal of the Scandal of Particularity. By Sally Douglas." (2017): 764-766.

bodies¹¹². Thus, to me, the most prevalent and most productive question to ask concerns the ever-present epistemological phenomenon of systematic incarceration, in be it patriarchy, the Christian system of gender hierarchy, a ubiquitous panopticon or capitalist realism, and becomes *how we can read critically that which is omnipresent yet invisible*. Meaning, that systematic and normalised ‘truths’ that feed on their own repetition and perpetuation through various notions of not only but also oppression, that now seem problematic, need to be discussed within and outside of its own discourse in order to dismantle problematic truths that holds our societies, and often minorities and non-western bodies and mind captured. Especially when looking at interventions to problematic all-swallowing systems, it becomes crucial to be able to undo naturalised assumption about the key figures of them, for example, God and Man. And in order to do so, we need to study that which is seemingly obvious and taken for granted as a key question in academia. Krondorfer writes; “How can we attempt to critically read the male body and to fix our gaze on men as gendered beings when such attempts are not only resisted but also caught in a house of mirrors. In this house of mirrors, images of masculinities are reflected everywhere, but as soon as we try to get hold of them, they disintegrate into distortions and fragmentation then disassemble and vanish”. A critical dismantling of masculinities’ place in the world, along with masculinised hegemonic authorities, gods and supremacists, require making visible the unquestioned normative patterns of veiled structural domineering and disciplinary systems, in which the world-religions that follow patriarchal systems become the most visible example of. Within these systems of oppression, it is well-worth noting that the overarching invisibility of such systems are not of course invisible in the same way for everyone concerned. For example, Sara Ahmed argues that whiteness is only invisible for the ones inhabiting white subject positions. For those who are exposed to the oppression and violence of the whites, whiteness is highly visible and present, but perhaps as an oppressive reality of acted supremacy, and not as a discursive analysis of oppressive systematic pillars upon which this oppression rests. Such interventions are made within for example critical masculinity studies, where the topic is made visible through discussing for example violent crimes and its relation to masculinity as a way of realising and discussing the philosophical crumbs of the most essential cause

¹¹² Krondorfer, Björn. (2018). God’s Hinder Parts and Masculinity’s Troubled Fragmentations: Trajectories of ‘Critical Men’s Studies in Religion’. *RELIGION IN DER GESELLSCHAFT*, 287.

and reasons for systematic oppression. However, the matters are in the wider scope of academia treated as niched, although they stand in the centrality of systematic processes.

Due to the dialectical space between knowledge production (e.g. academia) and faith that has been created since the Enlightenment due to the disruption of power of the church, the scholarship surrounding the notion of Christianity becomes a tool for how one can dismantle power structures that seem omnipresent, unquestioned and necessary at their ubiquitous peak. The discussion of the Gender of God is therefore also an example of an instrument to learn how to dismantle powerful mechanisms that govern society. In terms of patriarchy, this means that we need to articulate masculinity. And the most efficient method to do so, is to question the gender of what was and is concerned omnipresent and has shaped the knowledge production that we operate through and with. The invisible omnipresent masculinity, which has infiltrated so many realms of the patriarchal society, is a simulacrum of the blindness towards the normative masculine body's textual transformation into 'law, social institutions, normative discourse, cultural customs, artistic expressions and so forth'¹¹³. The invisible omnipresent masculinity therefore invisibly infiltrates into realms of society where it acts as an oppressive force towards a masculine superiority. In this way, the andromorphisation of God, (the God made masculine and masculine made God) is doubtless an essential brick in the air castle of the masculine as superior, which has been and is being built up through the masculine gaze of conventional history and the interpretations thereof.

The masculinification of God is not unnoticed in the Christian tradition of knowledge production. Further, there are examples of adaptations of the holy scripture and interpretations of the bible that have less of the masculine bias in it. The Spinozian idea of not attributing God to a specific form is widespread within Christianity. However, it seems contradictory to not attribute God to any particular form whilst persisting in a gendered pronoun and gendered analogies when describing who God is or what God does. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) #239 states, "God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is

¹¹³ Krondorfer, Björn. (2018). God's Hinder Parts and Masculinity's Troubled Fragmentations: Trajectories of 'Critical Men's Studies in Religion'. *RELIGION IN DER GESELLSCHAFT*, 287.

neither man nor woman: he is God."¹¹⁴. Does this statement not call to reform the idea of God in the mainstream church already? Attributing a masculine gendered pronoun and its following analogies does create an image of God as masculinised to suit a particular theological language that might not be crucial to correctly represent God. What the common mouth would call progressive churches, have started to embed both other pronouns and not merely masculine coded attributes to the Christian God. Although the CCC reproduces the traditional imagery and language of God the Father in both teaching and practice, it also notes that there are other, maternal imageries in the Bible, although God is not gendered according to those. Moreover, the CCC also mentions that human attributions to God, for example, fatherhood only imperfectly reflects the exemplary fatherhood that God would occupy. The presentation of God as masculine, often justified by analogies of God as literal Lord of the world, seems to contradict the statement of God as genderless, made by the CCC. Furthermore, Ramshaw argues that many Jewish and Christian theologians deny gender designations to God yet are continuing to use masculine pronouns¹¹⁵.

The tradition of the gender of God has changed in the last centuries, and Eriksson does in her article in TGV mean that theological research has successively toned down the feminine gender of God. She means that this is why the original un-ordered, or disarray, of the divine gender has not been visible. Thus, the relatively few feminine images of God in the bible, have previously been portrayed as with a greater light than it may do in the current era.

The feminine analogies that stick out in the bible are where God is resembling a bear with her cubs (Hos 13:8), or a comforting mother (Is 66:13); or a woman in labour (Is 42:14). Although their reaffirmation of the gendered binaries and their normative attributions, we can perhaps hold firm that a solely masculine representation of the alike, would make the interpretative force of God loading with an even heavier masculine imaginary. However, it affirms that the significance of God's masculinity

¹¹⁴ "Deum humanam sexuum transcendere distinctionem. Ille nec vir est nec femina, Ille est Deus." From "Pater per Filium revelatus", Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993): 1-2-1-1-2 ¶ 239. (Official English translation Archived March 3, 2013, at the Wayback Machine), David Bordwell, 2002, Catechism of the Catholic Church, Continuum International Publishing ISBN 978-0-86012-324-8 p. 84

¹¹⁵ Ramshaw, Gail. *God beyond gender: feminist Christian God-language*. Fortress Press, 1995, p. 25

holds a stronger ground throughout the bible. Nevertheless, the most affirmative feminine essence of God is hidden in the Hebrew noun used for the Holy Spirit, 'Ruach', which is distinctly feminine, especially when used in the Old Testament – but which is spoken and written about in masculine in the latter translations of the Latin and Germanic languages. Although there is a re-adaptation of the feminine holy spirit running through some strains of the protestant churches, most traditions gender the holy spirit masculine even though the original translation would be distinctly feminine. The New Testament also refers to the Spirit of God as masculine, although vague, but the most clearly in the Gospel of John 14-16. Some Christians define the Spirit as literally the feminine or female aspect of God, something that Ramshaw and other intellectuals in the movement criticise due to the primer argument against the anthromorphisation of God. Further, Eriksson does in her article in TGV mean that the inclusive language that is now sought after from an egalitarian and feminist perspective, is nothing new but a renaissance of old images of God that lift their ability of the warm caretaker and humble mother. However, these gendered attributes do not only serve a feminist intervention in the patriarchal order where God is the patriot but also creates an endorsement of the binaries that gender is chained to.

The language attributed to God in both the public and private sphere creates a space for integrating either a critical or patriarchal relation to and between gender, sexuality, race, class, and faith. Although the majority of Christian institutions gender God, and gender God masculine, there are proposals and practices of a more inclusive gendered language in some Christian congregations. For example, the Inclusive Language Lectionary published by the American National Council of Churches, to which many Protestant churches belong, states in its introduction "The God worshiped by the biblical authors and worshiped in the Church today cannot be regarded as having gender, race, or color."¹¹⁶ Some churches¹¹⁷ of Protestant denominations consider a gender-neutral language with the pronoun of God as 'it'. However, many Christian groups consider this type of adjustment inadequate in reflecting the essence of God due to its non-personal essence. Ramshaw does thereto

¹¹⁶ *An inclusive-language lectionary: Readings for Year B* (Revised ed.). National Council of Churches. 1987. pp. 12. ISBN 978-0-664-24059-2.

¹¹⁷ E.g. United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Metropolitan Community Church.

mean that Christians must abandon the use of the third-person pronoun to refer to God due to its fallibility in both gender equality and the upholding of God as a divine being outside of the gender spectrum ¹¹⁸.

Multiple groups consider gender-neutral language (e.g. referring to God as "it") as inadequate in reflecting the nature of God or as aesthetically inelegant. However, in recent history, several liberal and mainline Protestant denominations have adopted or encouraged its use when referring to God. Ramshaw also reflects on the usage of It in order to refer to God, however, argues that God is a being who continually relates to human person¹¹⁹. An objectification of God would be problematic in accounting for the relational aspect of what and who God is in the Christian tradition. The usage of the gender-neutral pronoun They is also discussed in Ramshaw's book. However, she argues for that the pronoun 'They' is an unacceptable pronoun for God. This, she means, is due to God receiving sanction as a singular, upholding a monotheistic in contrast to polytheistic religion. She argues that Christianity must always struggle against a 'popular tritheism that imagines a committee of three in the skies'¹²⁰. And further argues the counterproductivity of the pronoun 'They' due to the effort to believe and teach the fundamental tenet of monotheism. However, perhaps the boundary between monotheistic and polytheistic worldviews is more blurred than the Abrahamic religions noted¹²¹.

The pronoun they, could however correlate extremely well with the tricky notion of the Christian trinity. The trinity doctrine presents God as three beings or entities. If one would follow the ordinary rules for how to prescribe gender to something that is many, but also something that is vast in its gendered expression (Through God's wisdom; Sophia, and God's spirit Ruach which are both feminine), then it would make nothing less than a lot of sense to gender God as they.

Gendering, or ungendering God as they, embraces the trinity within Christianity and

¹¹⁸ Ramshaw, Gail. *God beyond gender: feminist Christian God-language*. Fortress Press, 1995, p. 29

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p. 27

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 27

¹²¹ An interesting but controversial argument proclaimed by Schneider. This is nothing I am going to focus on in my thesis, as I find it more suitable to argue for the 'they'-pronoun in the name of the Christian trinity – in order to not engage with the immense conversation over the blurry boundary between monotheistic and polytheistic religions. See: Schneider, Laurel. (2007). *Beyond monotheism: A theology of multiplicity*. Routledge.

also strengthens the use of the pronoun for the singular, as used by for example non-binary people. God as they, does then not only become a feminist and non-binary intervention in dominant Christian doctrines, but also a project of decolonisation of the othering of religions through the dismantling of the binaries of poly and mono that have been used in order to intend an othering of religions outside of the Abrahamic ones. The pronoun 'they' also embraces that there are more vast attributions to God than what suits into a masculine idea of the divine, and also allows to both combine and dismantle stringent ideas of masculine and feminine. Dismantling male and female in the Godly being opens up an interpretation of God that fulfils Spinoza's anthropomorphic criticism as well as upholds a personal and grammatically suitable order in which one with speak to, about and with God. Gendering or ungendering God as they portrays an image of God as necessarily being more, bigger and more vast than one could comprehend as well as it questions and discourages the constructed masculine top of the hierarchy that current projects of feminist theologians as well as knowledge production within the gender studies scholarship seek to enact.

Conclusion.

The thesis has aimed to explore how religion and spirituality is given meaning and acted upon in academia. The productive form of this aim is to explore if and how a post-secular turn in the production of academic knowledge would transform or is transforming hegemonic forms of academic knowledge in Swedish gender studies. Through a feminist critical discourse analysis, I have sought to analyse the secular and westernised pre-eminence over knowledge production within academia in the Nordic context. Through my thesis I am propositioning furthering the width of possibilities in both how questions are asked in the gender studies scholarship and by whom they can be asked.

Through analysing the firstness of secularity in knowledge production within Swedish feminist research, as well as, putting forwards the aims of intersectionality and decoloniality within the gender studies discourse I have answered and analysed my first research question. Naturalisation of secular academic knowledge, I have argued, firstly creates an uncritical eye on the secularist tradition. This means that it creates a boundary of what is being asked in Swedish feminist research and silences the frames that it is operating through. Religious and spiritual topics thereby become a merely a private matter for feminist subject positions, where perhaps everything should be considered political. Religion itself becomes a non-issue, in such a way that has already been opposed to in the fight for intersectionality with topics such as gender and ethnicity. With the thesis I have stepped into the struggle of including religious proximity in intersectional analyses. Secondly, the neutralisation of the secular academic knowledge production concerns the subject positions or topics that do not adhere to a secular tradition themselves. I have analysed how religious or spiritual topics are being othered in different modes when they are represented, or not, in the gender studies scholarship, based on theoretical arguments by feminist philosophers and empirical studies surrounding Nordic feminist research magazines. Thirdly, I have lifted the margins of Swedish feminist scholarship that focuses on the crossroads between faith and feminism and through those crumbs I have shaped an intervention to feminist theology through analysing the gender of the Christian God. There I analyse the similar naturalisation, and firstness, of a masculine Christian God and conclude that it does the topic does not face interest from the Swedish gender studies side, except for in the margins of it.

Epilogue

The religious feminist is a cumbersome provocation. And is perhaps the inconvenient truth of the border of the dichotomised secular & modern, and the religious & traditional. It may mark that uncomfortable situation between particularly strong identity shaping phenomena. Particularly strong homelands, communities, solidarities and missions.

The religious feminist is a cumbersome provocation. The subject position that Elisabeth Hjorth names in her article with exactly that name, sounds like a fanatical position. A fundamentalist, fictional figment of incompatible traditions. *Why?* Is there such a dichotomy between the religious and the feminist. And *why* is religiosity immediately connected to extremist positions?

The religious feminist is a cumbersome provocation. In the Swedish newspaper DN Hjorth voices the invisibility of the border-crossing identity between faith and feminism, the difficulty to relax into it. She is looking for voices that also walk in that borderland – but that position, is not getting heard and is neither wanted by the seemingly opposing traditions¹²².

The religious feminist is a cumbersome provocation. Hjorth means that the conversation of faith in Sweden, is dictated by a soft patriarchy of God, and nationalist conservatism. The debates of the religious are formed by that national conservatism and the men that set and have set the theological and linguistical agenda that has shaped its tradition.

The religious feminist is a cumbersome provocation. And two years ago, I read her article. My eyes glowing. Burning perhaps. There are so many things that we forget, so many subject positions that are misrepresented or silenced. *Here is mine.* Where is yours? I hope it is also a *cumbersome provocation.* I identify as a *cumbersome provocation.* A place for political action. For fruitful, brave academic discussions. Fuelled with celestial warmth and feminist activist fire. *What is your fuel?*

¹²² Hjorth, Elisabeth. "Den religiösa feministen är en ohanterlig provokation." *Dagens Nyheter* 21 november (2018).

Thank you, and you and you.

The religious.

My spiritual community across the borders. Magical and heartfelt.

The feminist.

My gender activist world, always passionate and feisty.

The cumbersome provocateur.

Diana Mulinari. For inspiration patience and comfort.

Karin Sporre. For academic prosperous generosity.

Alex. For being radically alive, an adoration, a planet-shaker.

The family.

Pappa. For support through all that I create & always reading my philosophical incomprehensibility.

The critics.

The pastors, teachers, classmates, flatmates, encounters, friends, loved ones, strangers, planet-shakers, long-time-no-see persons, combinations of those, who read, commented and discussed this process with me. Especially to those who ask particularly hard questions. Also, to those who just inspire.

The situation.

Thanks to what keeps me within academia – philosophers, professors, teachers, scholars, knowledge-seekers, my existentialist crew, and most recently, an exchange filled with cyberkids, dystopias, Mestizx consciousness, gender and theology. Thanks also to what makes me rest from academia – Berlin, flatmates, yogis, novels, parks, love, woods, plants on my balcony, mamma, sister and her garden, kids and kittens. Thanks to that complicated notion of God and life's complexity.

Bibliography

Akena, Francis Adyanga. "Critical analysis of the production of Western knowledge and its implications for Indigenous knowledge and decolonization." *Journal of Black Studies* 43.6 (2012)

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/la frontera*. Vol. 3. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Arvin, Maile, Tuck, Eve, Morrill, Angie (2013). "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy." *Feminist Formations*, 25(1), 8-34.

Appelros, Erica. "Religion och intersektionalitet." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 2-3 (2005): sid-69.

Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. *Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. Fordham Univ Press, 2013.

Backberger, Barbro, Margareta Bäck-Wiklund, Elisabeth Hjorth, Pia Laskar, Lars Raattamaa, and Johanna Langhorst. "Den heliga familjen." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 4 (2012).

Bailey, Alison & Cuomo, Chris. *Feminist Ontologies*, in "The feminist philosophy reader." 2008.

Balibar, Etienne, Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, and Senior Researcher Immanuel Wallerstein. *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities*. Verso, 1991.

Berg, Linda, Mikela Lundahl, and Lena Martinsson. "Sekularitet-förståhet genom religion och kön." *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 4 (2016).

Bordwell, David, "Catechism of the Catholic Church", *Continuum International Publishing*. 2002.

Braude, Ann "A Religious Feminist—Who Can Find Her? Historiographical Challenges from the National Organization for Women," *The Journal of Religion* 84, no. 4 (October 2004): 555-572.

Brenner, Athalya. "The Hebrew God and his female complements." In *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies*, pp. 72-87. Routledge, 2002.

Byrne, James. "Foucault On Continuity: The Postmodern Challenge To Tradition." *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 9, no. 3 (1992): 4.

Cassidy, Kathryn, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Georgie Wemyss. "Intersectional Border (ing) s." *Political Geography* 66 (2018): 139-141. & Dhaliwal, Sukhwant, and Nira

- Yuval-Davis. *Women against fundamentalism*. Lawrence & Wishart, 2014.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "What's in a name? Womanism, Black feminism, and beyond." *The Black Scholar* 26, no. 1 (1996): 9-17.
- Connell, Raewyn. "Using southern theory: Decolonizing social thought in theory, research and application." *Planning Theory* 13, no. 2 (2014): 210-223.
- Dhaliwal, Sukhwant, and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Women against fundamentalism*. Lawrence & Wishart, 2014.
- Diamond, Irene, and Lee Quinby. "Foucault and feminism: Reflections on resistance." (1988)
- Ekström, Malin, and Peter Forsberg. "Tema: Queer teologi (förord)." *lambda nordica* 15, no. 1-2 (2010): 6-9. Retrieved from <https://lambdanordica.org/index.php/lambdanordica/article/view/277>
- Eriksson, Anne-Louise. "Genusinkarnationer i kyrkans rum. En könad ordning." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 3-4 (2003): 15-24
- Fairclough, Norman (1996). A Reply to Henry Widdowson's 'Discourse Analysis: A Critical View. *Language & Literature* 5(1): 49–56.,
- Federici, Silvia. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch*. Autonomedia.
- Foucault, Michel. *Archaeology of knowledge*. Routledge, 2013.
- Foucault, Michel. "Orders of discourse." *Social science information* 10, no. 2 (1971): 7-30.
- Foucault, Michel. "Powers and Strategies," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).
- Foucault, Michel. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*. Brighton, UK: Harvester Press.
- Foucault, Michel. (2000b). The subject and power. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Vol. 3, pp. 326-348). New York: New Press. p. 326
- Gannon, Susanne, Bronwyn Davies (2012). "Postmodern, Post-Structural, and Critical Theories." In Hesse- Biber's *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*.
- Groenhout, Ruth E., and Marya Bower, eds. *Philosophy, feminism, and faith*. Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Grosfoguel, Ramón. "Colonial difference, geopolitics of knowledge, and global coloniality in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system." *Review (Fernand*

Braudel Center) (2002).

Haddox, Susan E. "Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades." *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 2 (2016): 176-206.

Halberstam, Jack. *Gaga feminism: Sex, gender, and the end of normal*. Vol. 7. Beacon Press, 2012.

Hall, Stuart (1986). "The Problem of Ideology — Marxism without Guarantees" (PDF). *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. **10** (2): 28–44.

Harding, Sandra G., ed. *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. Psychology Press, 2004. p. 93

Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Random House, 2014

Haraway, Donna. "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective." *Feminist studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599

Hauke, Manfred. *God Or Goddess?: Feminist Theology: what is It?: where Does it Lead?*. Ignatius Press, 1995.

Hekman, Susan. "Truth and method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22, no. 2 (1997): 341-365.

Hjorth, Elisabeth. "Den religiösa feministen är en ohanterlig provokation." *Dagens nyheter* 21 november (2018).

hooks, bell. "Ain't I a woman: black women and feminism (London: Pluto)." *Challenging Imperial Feminism* 19 (1982).

Irigaray, Luce. "This sex which is not one (1977)." *New York* (1985).

Keating, AnaLouise (2006). *From borderlands and new mestizas to nepantlas and nepantleras: Anzaldúan theories for social change*. Human architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-knowledge, 4(3), 3.

Khan, Geoffrey, Shmuel Bolozky, Steven Ellis Fassberg, Gary Rendsburg, Aaron D. Rubin, Ora Schwarzwald, and Tamar Zewi, eds. *Encyclopedia of Hebrew language and linguistics*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Kovach, Margaret. *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Krondorfer, Björn. (2018). God's Hinder Parts and Masculinity's Troubled Fragmentations: Trajectories of 'Critical Men's Studies in Religion'. *Religion in der Gesellschaft*.

Lazar, Michelle, ed. *Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power and ideology in discourse*. Springer, 2005.

Liinason Mia and Clara Meijer (2018) Challenging constructions of nationhood and nostalgia: exploring the role of gender, race and age in struggles for women's rights in *Scandinavia. Women's History Review*. 27: 5.

Mahmood, Saba. (2013). Religious reason and secular affect: An incommensurable divide, in *Is critique secular?: blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. Fordham Univ Press. (2013):

Marion, Iris. "Thoughts on multicultural dialogue." *Ethnicities* 1, no. 1 (2001): 116-122.

Mignolo, Walter. "The communal and the decolonial." *The Communal and the Decolonial* (2010): 245-261.

Mignolo, Walter & Madina, Tlostanova "Global coloniality and the decolonial option." *Kult* 6, no. Special Issue (2009): 130-147.

Narayan, Uma, Sandra G. Harding, and Sandra Harding, eds. *Decentering the center: Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial, and feminist world*. Indiana University Press, 2000

Nietzsche, Friedrich "Daybreak" #9, in *A Nietzsche Reader*, ed. R.J. Hollingdale (Hannondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

Nordberg, Marie, and Magnus Mörck. "I sekulariseringens skugga. Manlighet och religiös tematik i svensk och amerikansk 1920-talsfilm." *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap* 3-4 (2008): sid-91.

Nortjé-Meyer, Lilly. "Early Church Understandings of Jesus as the Female Divine: The Scandal of the Scandal of Particularity. By Sally Douglas." (2017): 764-766.

Parmeggiani, Francesca. (2011). Speaking of God: the post-secular challenge for Italian feminist thought and practices. *Annali d'Italianistica*.

Ramshaw, Gail. *God beyond gender: feminist Christian God-language*. Fortress Press, 1995.

Redner, Cecilia. *Under regnbågen står du inte ensam, Överlevnadsguide för queerkids*. Svenska Kyrkan Västerås Stift. 2020

Rubin, Gayle. "The traffic in women: Notes on the "political economy" of sex." (1975).

Schneider, L. (2007). *Beyond monotheism: A theology of multiplicity*. Routledge.

Scott, Joan Wallach. *Only paradoxes to offer*. Harvard University Press, 1996.

Sheridan, Mark. *Language for God in Patristic Tradition: Wrestling with Biblical Anthropomorphism*. InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Singh, Jakeet. "Religious agency and the limits of intersectionality." *Hypatia* 30, no. 4 (2015): 657-674.

Sporre, Karin (1999). *Först när vi får ansikten: Ett flerkulturellt samtal om feminism, etik och teologi* (Vol. 9). Lund University.

Van Dijk. Teun A. (2008). *Discourse and Power*. Houndsmills: Palgrave.

Wilshire, Donna. "The uses of myth, image, and the female body in re-visioning knowledge." *Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist reconstructions of being and knowing* (1989) p. 95-96

Wodak, Ruth (Ed.) (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis: Four Volumes*. Sage.

Young, Iris Marion. "Thoughts on multicultural dialogue." *Ethnicities* 1, no. 1 (2001): 116-122.

"Deum humanam sexuum transcendere distinctionem. Ille nec vir est nec femina, Ille est Deus." From "Pater per Filium revelatus", *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993): 1-2-1-1-2 ¶ 239. (Official English translation Archived March 3, 2013, at the Wayback Machine)

An inclusive-language lectionary: Readings for Year B (Revised ed.). National Council of Churches. 1987. pp. 12. ISBN 978-0-664-24059-2.