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2 SRHR, the liberated body, and the primacy of conscience

Probing beyond the secular/religious binary

An Van Raemdonck

Introduction

In this chapter I review discourses on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) through a lens that critically interrogates the religious/secular binary. With this aim in mind, I selectively review the development of SRHR concepts and major controversies that have been articulated along religious/secular fault lines. Institutionalised religious voices and religious actors within civil society have opposed these concepts since their initial formulation at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP), held in Cairo in 1994. Today, women's reproductive rights – and gender and sexuality issues in general – have only become more visible as a major bone of contention between institutionalised religious actors on the one hand and women's rights activist groups on the other. Over the past years, opposition increased against women's access to abortion services, contraception, and sexual education. Such resistance has been expressed in popular street protests across the globe. Feminists deplore this new power balance in which institutionalised religion has (re)gained authority over women's bodies, personal, reproductive choices and sexual practices. Whereas academic scholarship has been engaged to understand the intricate junctions between religious (particularly Christian) authorities, evolving religious (Christian) doctrine and state politics in different national contexts (e.g. Bracke and Paternotte 2016; Case 2016; Köttig, Bitzan, and Pétó 2017; Mishtal 2015), the public debate easily reveals reassertions of a divide between a conservative religious front versus secular progressives.

This chapter examines discursive engagements with SRHR, with a focus on the role of the body and bodily transformation and with the aim to destabilise the belief in a religious/secular binary structuring and determining opponents and supporters of SRHR. In a first section, I selectively review literature on sexuality and SRHR in a postcolonial context. This literature demonstrates a turn toward the recognition of embodied knowledge and agency, and emphasises positive aspects of sexuality as pleasure and enjoyment. In the second section, I discuss the enfolding of discourses on SRHR among Christian, particularly Roman Catholic, institutionalised

and non-institutionalised voices. I focus on the role of the Vatican and its political interventions on the international level on the one hand and a civil society group, Catholics for Choice (CFC), that defends sexual and reproductive rights on the other. I then juxtapose different underlying theoretical understandings of the body and contrast the Vatican's naturalistic body with activists' liberated, transformed body and finally, with CFC's 'primacy of the conscience'. The third and final section of the chapter critically engages with the notion of 'strategic secularism' that has been invoked by sociologist Juan Marco Vaggione to capture the ambiguous nature of religious groups' responses to SRHR. I propose to use its mirror-concept, 'strategic religiosity', to illuminate the processes through which progressive gender and sexuality politics become naturalised as secular.

Pleasure and danger in the postcolonial context: SRHR, embodied knowledge, and agency

In this section, I focus particularly on the role of the body, bodily liberation, and transformation in literature on gender, sexuality, and development in postcolonial contexts. Much has been said about the overwhelming focus on danger, risk, and illness in Western writings and interventions concerning non-Western sexualities. Anthropologist Signe Arnfred is one among many voices concerned with revealing colonial continuities in current representations of African sexualities (Arnfred 2005). The long-term Western fascination and political interest in non-Western sexuality brought about many 'tales' in contrast to the predominant African feminist 'silence' on topics of gender and sexuality. Relying on gender studies scholar Amina Mama, Arnfred brings to the fore the amplitude of Western tales on African sexuality in contrast to a remarkable African silence, suggesting that the latter may be an indirect reaction to the West's persistent preoccupation (Arnfred 2005, 59). She weaves together colonial and imperialist representations of African sexuality with current donor-driven development interests and scholarly agendas. Issues of sexuality have been mostly conceptualised in terms of illness, violence, and death and often either victimise or blame women. Rarely has female desire, sexual pleasure, and enjoyment been considered by social scientists or by the development sector in a manner that engages with local understandings of sexual scripts, subjectivities, and moralities (Pigg and Adams 2005).

Similarly, in relation to discussions of SRHR, the problems, dangers, risks, and violence have usually taken centre stage. Women construct a "political economy of the body" (Petchesky 2001) in their reproductive and sexual health negotiations, which is "often at a cost to their bodies and health", argues anthropologist Sabina Rashid (Rashid 2008, 158). Rashid studied the sexual and reproductive lives of poor Bangladeshi women by focussing on larger social, economic, and political structures in which women act and make their choices. In this context and for these women,

sexual and reproductive behaviour means "something to forfeit in exchange for tenuous rights to security; they mean a short-lived power – mediated by men – over other equally poor but older women" (Rashid 2008, 158). While Rashid takes a critical anthropological approach to the ways in which women negotiate sexual behaviour and transactions, the dangerous and oppressive dimensions are highlighted.

Carole Vance's seminal work *Pleasure and Danger* (1984) positioned female sexuality between structures of oppression, risk, and danger and personal agency and experiences of joy and pleasure (Vance 1984). Following Vance, the critique that sexual risk and danger are prioritised over other, positive dimensions of sexual experiences and discourse has been articulated by many scholars (e.g. Groes-Green 2009; Jolly, Cornwall, and Hawkins 2013; McFadden 2003; Undie 2013). Instead of focusing on danger and risk, feminists and social scientists have argued to consider pleasure as an important vantage point to study sexual and reproductive health and personal wellbeing. When female sexuality is kept in a sphere of danger, disease, and violence, this leads to a narrow discursive and embodied space that precludes the exploration of other, positive dimensions. Moreover, it may lead to a reinforcement of dominant social conceptions of gender and sexuality. African feminist sociologist Patricia McFadden, for instance, argues that "hegemonic notions of sexual behaviour and heterosexist expectations" have shaped responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis, "while reinforcing the deeply embedded cultural taboos and claims that define sexual pleasure and freedom as 'dangerous' and 'irresponsible'" (McFadden 2003, 1). She argues furthermore that the reinforcement of these notions contributed to a rapid spread of the disease among women (McFadden 2003, 1).

Indeed, interventions of international development in the Global South may, sometimes unwittingly, reproduce and reinforce dominant male-centred notions. In a similar vein, women's rights and anti-prostitution laws have been appropriated in South Korea in ways that reinforce ideas of gender-conservative cultural authenticity and circumscribe womanhood within narrow nationalist frames (Cheng 2011). In Egypt, the vernacularisation of campaigns against female genital cutting have equally reinforced male-centred normative notions of gender and sexuality and reproduced representations of women as victims while at the same time being responsible for negative sexuality (Van Raemdonck 2018). When discourse on sexuality is overwhelmingly cast in terms of dominant moralities, the space to discuss actual sexual practices, women's lived experiences, and embodied knowledge is narrowed. Similarly, feminist scholar Chi-Chi Undie argued in the context of sub-Saharan Africa to acknowledge the importance of "sexuality and sexual well-being – even when working on sexual violence" (Undie 2013, 185). Victims of violence particularly have a need to talk about sexuality and sexual wellbeing, she argues, in order to be able to continue life and not to be defined by the negative sexual experiences.

These scholars aim to theoretically advance the importance of a focus on sexual and bodily pleasure and actual sexual practices. Gender scholar Bibi Bakare-Yusuf echoes Vance when stating that “the assertion of women’s sexual and embodied agency is potentially more threatening and disruptive to a hetero-patriarchal controlling logic than a focus on danger and violation” (Bakare-Yusuf 2013, 29). Drawing attention to the problems of sexual violence and danger remains important, but at the same time it allows for the continuation of perceptions of women as passive recipients of “hetero-masculine prerogatives and therefore in need of protection from normative erotic violence” (Bakare-Yusuf 2013, 29).

A final aspect related to sexual behaviour, reproductive rights, and body politics in a postcolonial context is the great importance of continued international power differences and inequalities. Global economic and political inequalities continue to contribute to tensions between the universality of rights and the particularities of local contexts, histories, and politics. Anthropologist Richard Shweder states that most anthropologists have difficulty to embrace simplistic moral universalism, although “since the advent of global feminism and the international human rights movement, the scene within the discipline of anthropology has become more complex”, as he puts it laconically (Shweder 2012, 88). Examples of how interventions in the field of rights – particularly women’s rights or SRHR – meet with some form of local resistance are manifold. The resistance by the state of Uganda against sexual and LGBT rights may be the most pronounced illustration of the entanglement of international development aid promoting sexual rights and politicised resistance that is articulated through antigay positions (Lange and Tvedten 2016).¹ This case highlights the entanglement of race, colonialism, and reproduction in the imperial/colonial era, and its contemporary translations in the concern with population management and normative international gender and sexuality politics. This may provoke or contribute to local resistances to SRHR as sexual topics become highly politicised and claims against them become framed as nationalist-protectionist, rather than religiously inspired.

Institutionalised religion’s opposition to SRHR: safeguarding ‘pelvic orthodoxy’

In the following sections, I discuss Christian institutionalised and non-institutionalised religious discourse on SRHR, while keeping a focus on views of the body and bodily transformation. Through this discussion I aim to destabilise the oft-employed dichotomy between progressive secular versus conservative religious viewpoints on SRHR. I will give most attention to Christianity and particularly Roman Catholicism because the Holy See has been playing a crucial role in forming international and cross-religious alliances in opposition to proposals for SRHR. The Holy See’s attitude in the preparation of the 1994 International Conference on Population and

Development (ICPD) in Cairo and in its aftermath at the ICPD+5 summits has been widely remarked upon. The Holy See represents Vatican City state and the global Catholic church. Having the status of non-member permanent observer at the UN, the Vatican was still able to greatly influence decision-making via lobbying and by forming alliances with conservative Islamic states. The Cairo Programme of Action, resulting from the ICPD conference, established the terminology of reproductive health, after a consensus was reached to drop references to sex and sexuality. In the following years, however, reproductive health kept being criticised by gender-conservative actors as a concept that promotes premarital – adolescent – or extramarital sexual interactions, abortion or contraceptive means, and reproductive choice. Abortion and homosexuality are often constructed as the most urgent and visible forms of an encroaching international agenda of gender and sexual equality (Vaggione 2005, 241).

According to development studies scholar David Hulme, opponents of reproductive health such as “the Holy See, a small number of conservative Islamic states and, later, conservative Christians and the Bush administration mixed their moral reasoning with judicious political manoeuvring” (Hulme 2009, 3). Conservative actors across religious denominations and political groups started collaborating to oppose feminist demands on gender and sexuality, unlikely as their partnering would seem. Such forms of ‘unholy’ or ‘uneasy’ alliance building between religious and political right-wing groups has continued until today (Fassin 2014). Religious actors’ transnational collaboration also served as an illustration of the political transformations of contemporary public religion. These changes show a ‘reactive politicization’ of religious groups, as they form civil society networks to the example of feminist and gender equality groups (Vaggione 2005). This extraordinarily friendly meeting of representatives across different institutionalised religious groups was guided by a shared concern in safeguarding “pelvic orthodoxy”, as religious ethics scholar Daniel Maguire coined it (Maguire 2000, 188–189). Women’s reproduction appeared as a non-negotiable subject, but this focus on ‘pelvic issues’ needs to be contextualized, as history shows us different concerns of orthodoxy across time and place. Maguire calls it therefore a false orthodoxy. It is being created by current representatives of the Vatican and Muslim faith representatives who are interested in making it seem as a timeless and monolithic religious ‘orthodox’ claim.

The alliance’s lobby work combined with transnational agencies and the role of political powers at that moment succeeded in keeping the term ‘reproductive health’ out of international development policy for the following five years after ICPD. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) were formulated in 2000 and referred only to maternal and child health and no longer used the term ‘reproductive health’. The older and more established institution of ‘family planning’ was considered less controversial as the emphasis remained on the family, and male relatives were not considered as being excluded. The concept of reproductive health and rights, however,

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foregrounds women's individual bodies, personal rights, and choices (Hulme 2009, 6). By the mid-2000s, supporters of reproductive health managed to influence high-level UN policymaking again in their favour, and the term started to reappear in UN documents and consequent MDG goal setting.

Conservative-religious opposition to concepts of reproductive health is not homogenous. For the Holy See, abortion has taken central place, whereas for Islamic states, premarital sexual interaction has been of major concern (Hulme 2009, 13). For many Catholics, the fight against abortion and contraception has been based on a theology of "unrestricted defence of life at conception" (Peñas Defago and Morán Faúndes 2014, 84). This theological belief, however, should not be seen as 'essentially Christian', but has come to be dominant as a consequence of several factors, including historical clerical changes and responses to modernity (Maguire 2000). Christian theologians have pointed out that traditional Christian doctrine is not necessarily in conflict with the concepts of SRHR. Particularly, pro-life doctrine has not been a constant and fixed position in Christian history. Moreover, Maguire asserts that there has been an "openness to choice on abortion and on contraception in the core of the tradition" (2000, 194). When examining Christian theological standpoints, one finds a pluralism of opinions among which opponents of abortion and pro-life figure as one among many. The longest held position in the Roman Catholic Church is that of 'delayed animation or ensoulment'. A continuation of classic Greek thought, this position holds that "the spiritual human soul did not arrive in the foetus until as late as three months into the pregnancy" (2000, 194). In the first three months, there was believed to be first a vegetative soul, then an animal soul, and only in the final phase of completion a human soul. He concludes that "the most traditional and stubbornly held position in Catholic Christianity is that early abortions are not murder" (2000, 195). It is therefore not Christian doctrine per se but rather the turn toward hierarchic absolutism and papal infallibilism that contributed to current rigid doctrinal positions. In the late 19th century, the Vatican turned to the current view that "the embryo is fully human from the moment of conception" (Radford Ruether 2008, 187) and disavowed contraception and abortion under any circumstances. Since then, the articulation of a 'pelvic orthodoxy' has become a defining focus of orthodoxy that reaches well beyond the premises of the Vatican and transnational and supranational summits. It has been regulating and inspiring global religious civil society activism as well.

'Strategic secularism' or 'strategic religiosity'?

Religious activism as 'strategic secularism'

Since the 1970s, pro-life activism and protests defending traditional family values developed on the basis of an unconditional defence of life at conception. Led by several major non-governmental organisations (NGOs) based

in the USA and Europe, such as Human Life International, this protest became a movement with strong international presence. The doctrine of the protection of life from conception served as an anchor around which protest and activism against SRHR was organised. This activism mirrors feminist activism and supporters of gender and sexual equality in more than one way, argues sociologist Juan Marco Vaggione. Organisations deploy discourses and use certain methods that are reminiscent of secular women's rights activism. Instead of using theological or moral framing, they take recourse to scientific and legal discourse when defending the idea of the natural family, a development that Vaggione called "strategic secularism" (2005, 242).

In building their case, religious groups develop a sort of strategic secularism that is neither what secularization is supposed to be, a way to foster – more open discourses and negotiable positions – nor what it is not – the imposition of a religious doctrine. It is in that middle space of the secular/nonsecular that the empowerment of religion has been taking place.

(Vaggione 2005, 242)

Vaggione places religious groups' activism in defence of the 'natural family' and against reproductive health and rights in what he sees as a kind of middle ground between secular and religious activity. He characterises such groups' engagement with a secular sphere and logics as instrumental or strategic and as having moved away from position-taking that is solely articulated through religious doctrine. He portrays this as "a switch from an active evangelization into a reactive politicization, as an appropriation and redeployment of secular strategies of political intervention" (Vaggione 2005, 245). Whether or not we agree with Vaggione's understanding of what is intrinsically religious or secular, or what secularisation should be, his observations of the explicit activist and political nature of religious pro-life groups have been widely shared.

Religious civil society activism has in turn fed back to institutionalised religion. Roman Catholic religious groups and networks promoting family values – based on the pro-life dogma – have in their turn inspired the Holy See in terms of methods and strategies. There has occurred a general "shift away from doctrinal arguments towards the use of more secular rhetoric, using sophisticated technical evidence and strategic interpretations of international human rights standards" (Coates et al. 2014, 117). One significant illustration of this shift is the way in which the Holy See coupled the right to life, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to its own particular understanding of the moment of conception as the start of life that consequently has the right to be protected and saved (Coates et al. 2014, 119).

In a similar vein, scientific reasoning and language have been mobilised to create support in the case against abortion. Pro-life activists protesting

outside of abortion clinics in England and Wales, for instance, claimed that the understanding of “the beginning of life” at the moment of conception has been theoretically endorsed by scientists (Lowe and Page 2018, 11). These activists aim to appeal to a secular audience and therefore try to rely on allegedly scientific facts. In this context, activists said to look for arguments that are more effective than religious ones. Such efforts lead to statements where “scientific facts” are pushed in certain directions to make claims that scientists themselves would not routinely make” (Lowe and Page 2018, 11). Lowe and Page conclude that the anti-abortion activists they studied relied on a mixture of both religious and secular discourse, rather than qualifying these efforts as strategically engaging with the secular.

The liberated body and the “primacy of conscience”: secular and religious convergences

Religious and secular discourse meet in more ways than in activist methods and use of scientific language. SRHR supporters often reveal an underlying modern understanding of the body and the individual. The body is considered in need of liberation and transformation, and a modern person shows that they possess reflexivity and an individualised understanding of themselves and their body. According to sociologist Chris Shilling, modern individuals are characterised by an increased concern “to define their bodies as *individual* possessions which are integrally related to their self-identities” (1997, 30, emphasis added). The women’s movement leading up to the articulation of SRHR maintained a central focus on the body from early on. The Boston Women’s Health Collective (BWHC) in the 1970s played a central role in promoting knowledge about women’s bodies and sharing (disappointing) experiences with health care providers. The BWHC women started meeting and working together to compose their own educational course material on women’s bodies and health. The introduction states:

We wanted to share both the excitement and the material we were learning with our sisters. We saw ourselves differently and our lives began to change. . . . It was exciting to learn new facts about our bodies, but it was even more exciting to talk about how we felt about our bodies, how we felt about ourselves, how we could become autonomous human beings, how we could act together on our collective knowledge to channel the health care system for women and for all people.

(Boston Women’s Health Collective 1970)

It was crucial to them to gain better knowledge of their own bodies by relying on their own knowledge and experiences. Learning and sharing knowledge were transformative experiences. This inherent understanding

of liberation and transformation remains present in the later conceptualisation of SRHR. When SRHR are truly fulfilled, a transformative shift in body and life experience is implied or expected. In order to reach this fulfilment, a higher level of individualisation is needed.

Feminist sociologist Patricia McFadden writes that social values that embrace higher levels of individualisation are crucial to bring about a desired transformation of women’s lives. For her, the opportunity of having individual choice in sexuality is central and needs to move beyond reproductive health and safe sexual behaviour:

On one level, emotional calls are being made on women to conform to traditional roles as caregivers and nurturers. On another, their struggles for *individual freedoms, social autonomy and bodily integrity* are – often in subtle and devious ways – invalidated or curbed by a cultural climate that construes such choices and mobility as dangerous, irresponsible and selfish.

(McFadden 2003, 4, emphasis added)

McFadden describes traditional roles for women as nurturers and caretakers who willingly sacrifice their own needs. She argues that it is difficult for them to reach higher levels of individualisation that would enable them to claim and enjoy sexual and reproductive rights. McFadden draws from Audre Lorde to state that fully enjoying these rights would go beyond obtaining personal security and safety and should encompass a wider range of freedom in sexual choices that relies on women’s recognition of their own “erotic power” (Lorde 1982). Having access to that erotic power and making use of it requires highly individualised thinking and feeling processes. These feminist values underlying SRHR point therefore toward a reclaimed feminist body that is emancipated and liberated.

Some of these feminist understandings resonate with religious supporters of SRHR, such as Catholics for Choice (CFC). For some theologians and Christian activists, it is imperative to reveal the historical contingency of the Vatican’s current position-taking and to resist its absolutism as it has been enacted since the 1994 ICPD conference. This is one strategy among others to connect to an emancipatory agenda. The activist network CFC present themselves as articulating “an expression of Catholicism as it is lived by ordinary people: We are part of the great majority of faithful in the Catholic church who disagree with the dictates of the Vatican on matters related to sex, to marriage, to family life and to motherhood” (Harth 2008). This network has been the most vehement faith-based opponent of the Holy See’s positions and attempted to remove the Holy See’s status as a non-member permanent observer within the UN (Coates et al. 2014). In other words, CFC state to reclaim their own religious interpretations of gender and sexuality matters based on self-described ‘ordinary’ women’s lived realities.

I want to argue therefore that the notion of individuality and personal freedom of choice is equally present in CFC's viewpoints, although it bears more on the individual conscience and the psyche rather than the physical body. CFC refer to "the primacy of conscience" and emphasise the importance of personal conscience more than established teachings by the church (Harth 2008). Respect and tolerance for individuals' decisions is considered part of the history of Christian teachings. CFC asserts to be more representative of 'ordinary' Catholic believers than the church hierarchy, which they describe as a "minority on sexual and reproductive morals within Catholicism" (Harth 2008). Matters of marriage, divorce, parenting, and SRHR ought to be discussed within the field of public health and human rights, rather than religious doctrine, they argue. While firmly defending the primacy of conscience, they embrace public policymaking based on public health concerns and human rights.

CFC strive to improve access to sexual and reproductive care and justice based on the lived realities and particular life conditions of women. The network privileges women's own ability to make personal moral choices over their lives and bodies. Whereas personal conscience and moral decision-making is the primary focus, rather than the body, CFC equally supports SRHR, easily unsettling the conservative religious versus progressive secular binary. Similarly to CFC, the American Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) prioritises women's personal choices. This interfaith coalition provides support to diverse religious communities that promote the principle of women's choice, drawing on the 'moral power' and 'religious beliefs' to support their work (RCRC). In sum, the secular feminist movement's concern with the body has been matched by a religious concern with personal conscience and morality, particularly within Roman Catholic Christianity.

Family values, the natural family, and the naturalistic body: secular and religious divergences on SRHR

In contrast to a liberal feminist analysis of transformative liberation through higher individualisation, or the prioritisation of women's conscience, the Holy See and other Christian civil society groups that follow Rome's teachings make passionate pleas to re-value family values. Increased individualisation is seen as harmful. The mission of the Holy See at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 stated that

the authentic and true advancement of women... can only happen through the recognition of the deep fundamental anthropological truths about man and woman and not through the 'exaggerated individualism' which is promoted by the sexual and reproductive rights movement.

(Coates et al. 2014, 120)

More recently, addressing an international summit on formulating post-2015 development goals, the Holy See expressed support to:

acknowledge and enable women to overcome barriers to equality without forcing them to abandon what is essential to them. [Women] exist within the context of relationships which provide meaning, richness, identity, and human love. Their relationships, especially their role within the family – as mothers, wives, and caregivers – have profound effects on the choices women make and their own prioritisation of the rights which they exercise across their lifespans.

(Holy See 2014)

The 'family' and 'family values' in the discourse of the Holy See "becomes the all-encompassing rebuttal to both the existence of and requirement for sexual and reproductive health rights" (Holy See 2014). The family figures as the direct opposite of SRHR, and both are presented as antagonistic figures that are mutually exclusive. The Vatican has a long history of opposing any international declarations that might challenge the traditional heterosexual norm of the nuclear family (Radford Ruether 2008, 189). In this view, family is a sanctified union by God and refers to the lifelong marital pact between husband and wife. Women are not primarily perceived as individuals holding personal rights but are rather seen in a relational perspective. Women form part of a family and a wider community. Such views rely on a naturalistic view of the body as the "pre-social, biological basis on which the superstructure of the self and society are founded" (Shilling 1997, 41). In this perspective, women's bodies are first and most of all seen as biologically different than men's bodies. Their bodies are 'weak' and 'unstable', and this explains the different social roles of women as they are naturally limited and defined by their biological and material limitations and capabilities.

In line with these views, motherhood itself is naturalised. An analysis of religious anti-abortion activists in the UK and Wales show that "[m]otherhood is constructed as 'natural' and sacred, therefore abortion must be damaging because it destroys women's 'natural' position" (Lowe and Page 2018). For these activists, motherhood is essential and natural to womanhood, and abortion then naturally harms women. Since women are naturally driven to give life, abortion would cause severe psychological and spiritual stress and hardship. For them, women who seek abortion are seen as having no faith, being un-religious, and as acting selfishly. Women seeking abortion do not respect the 'natural' morality that defines them as being a member of a larger whole such as family and society. In this societal organic conception, women understand their place and role as part of the larger structure in which they carry responsibilities. When they conceive themselves only as individuals, however, they seek to fulfil their own selfish interests and ignore their social responsibilities. With respect to

conceptions of the body as an avenue to SRHR, secular and institutionalised religious concerns diverge.

Beyond the religious-secular binary

The Holy See and Christian religious activist groups connect to secular concerns (such as human rights discourse) and deploy science-based language in order to connect with a secularised audience. Particularly, conservative anti-abortion groups relied on these methods, which inspired institutionalised religious organisations such as the Holy See as well. Sociologist Vaggione has described these processes as 'strategic secularism', as mentioned earlier. He considers not only religious activists who are opponents of SRHR as 'strategic secularists', but equally so progressive religious groups, such as CFC, who are supporters of SRHR (Vaggione 2005, 237–240). The latter, progressive religious groups, have been described as tending "to speak the language of secularism with respect to sexuality and reproduction" (Sands 2000, 60).

Theologians who develop positions against the dominant viewpoints of their institutions can therefore be situated in the middle ground between the religious and the secular, argues Vaggione. They engage in a form of dissidence or internal antagonism concerning gender and sexuality issues, for instance, by defending the use of contraception and being pro-choice of abortion within their religious tradition. While remaining firmly embedded within 'the religious sphere' and expressing belonging there, they engage with opinions generally considered to be external or coming from 'the secular sphere'. These dissident opinions, he argues, show the flexibility and porosity of the religious/secular boundaries. Moreover, "gender and sexuality need, also, to be understood as spaces where the religious and the secular fuse and interact" (Vaggione 2005, 251).

Vaggione seems to suggest that issues of sexuality and gender provide the ideal fertile ground for processes of redefining the boundaries of religious and secular concerns and discourse. Christian theologian Maguire puts this into practice and suggests to present access to family planning, abortion, and contraception as human rights. Since human rights "have become the keystone of international ethics", he believes that casting reproductive rights in terms of human rights offers the best of both worlds (2000, 190). Rights discourse can remove the topic out of the sphere of influence of religious orthodoxy while it still reflects the deeper religious concern with the sanctity of life, human dignity, and compassion, he argues. Contemporary theologians should be naturally interested to consider the conditions needed to protect and preserve our ecology of life: "The dignity of human life that undergirds all human rights claims cannot be honoured if the means to fertility control are denied" (Maguire 2000, 191). Maguire finds support in ethics to challenge religious orthodoxy against reproductive health, such as abortion, contraception, and family planning.

While Vaggione and Maguire encourage the incorporation of (secular) ethics, human rights, and the language of gender and sexual equality by theologians and religious groups, theologian Kathleen Sands has more reservations *vis-à-vis* such developments. She asserts that, instead, the very binaries of religious/non-religious (and public/private) ought to be questioned. Rather than progressive religious actors retreating "from public ethical discourse on secularist principles", she argues, they better reclaim a proper progressive religious public voice (Sands 2000, 61).² Following the progressive religious retreat and embrace of secular language and principles, she states, the use of the secular/religious binary mainly serves conservative religious factions who are, on the contrary, not hesitant to claim public space. The real task for progressive religious forces would then be to occupy a stronger theological ground in the public space. Sand's criticism is reminiscent of post-secularist critique on the constitution of the religious and the secular as separate realms. Anthropologist and religious studies scholar Charles Hirschkind asserted that secularity is most of all about possessing a particular capacity to mobilise the religious/secular tension in a productive way (Hirschkind 2011, 643–644). In the frame of this discussion on secular and religious discourse on SRHR, I argue therefore that the religious-secular binary can be called on and framed by multiple secular or religious actors, intendedly or unwittingly, resulting in the reinforcement of the public position and powers of either sides.

Conversely, Sands' criticism can be brought into relation with the welcoming of progressive religious groups by secular campaigners of SRHR. Some advocates call to include religious civil society groups and faith-based organisations more thoroughly in campaigns to advance SRHR. Progressive religious supporters of SRHR and progressive gender roles are considered an important part of the larger struggle, for instance, by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL). This struggle is waged against what is identified as religious fundamentalisms, or "the use of religion... to legitimize... authoritarian political power and to essentialize social control" (CWGL 2014). The CWGL suggests to keep a strong focus on secularism to secure elected representatives' accountability, and on human rights, because a human rights approach to development "ensures transformational change" (CWGL 2014). Such instrumental reliance on progressive religious support can be considered as a form of strategically valuing these religious forces as far as they help to advance the common goals. Vaggione's analysis of strategic secularism, when religious groups strategically employ secular language, can be easily reversed to capture how secular advocacy groups incorporate religious groups and authorities to endorse common goals. Viewing such initiatives as 'strategic religiosity' helps to place the idea of 'strategy' in perspective and to reveal underlying power dynamics. This mirror-concept shows that the common goal, some progressive politics on family, gender, and sexuality, is generally identified as a secular one. Religious groups who endorse them

are considered as aberrant exceptions that share in a common 'secular' goal. Seeing its mirror-concept of 'strategic religiosity' allows us then to place the religious contribution central and understand religious progressive politics as an independent undertaking and substantiated goal or mission. In short, the concept of strategic religiosity helps to illuminate how progressive gender and sexuality politics becomes naturalised as secular.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed different discursive engagements with Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. It is driven by a twofold aim: first, to destabilise common popular conceptions of a secular versus religious binary in matters of gender and sexuality; and second, to look at underlying motivations for support of SRHR and theoretical understandings of the body. I selectively reviewed feminist postcolonial literature on matters of sexuality and reproduction in postcolonial contexts, pointing at a turn toward the need for a higher appreciation of bodily knowledge, agency, and pleasure. Second, I looked at Catholic Christian institutionalised and non-institutionalised groups, primarily the Holy See and the activist organisation Catholics for Choice. I showed that while there are underlying different motivations, support of SRHR cuts across the secular-religious binary. Past and present feminist activism for SRHR have foregrounded the body and focused on bodily knowledge, liberation, and transformation. Catholic groups supportive of SRHR, however, focus on the mind by placing freedom of conscience and personal morality central. They contest hierarchical church teachings and reclaim Christian viewpoints on SRHR based on the experiences and lives of 'ordinary' community members. These secular-religious convergences in support of SRHR lead me to interrogate the meanings and effects of the secular-religious binary. My argument is that religious supporters of SRHR find themselves captive of the public reinforcement of a secular vs. religious binary, which understands them to be either an anomaly or 'strategic secularists'. This points at the need to occupy a stronger innovative public theological ground that transcends and disrupts the secular-religious binary. Finally, by introducing the notion of 'strategic religiosity', I aim to highlight processes through which progressive gender and sexuality politics become naturalised as 'secular'.

Notes

- 1 The increased complexity of development's involvement with sexual rights and what this means for anthropological and queer study is most clearly outlined by Christine's Klapeer's work and invites more theoretical and empirical involvement (Klapeer 2017).
- 2 She states that the 'inefficiency' of progressive religious groups to be heard publicly reaches beyond theology, and she understands that this "is due to forces that are social, economic and political, rather than simply ideological" (Sands 2000, 64).

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3 The religious embodiments of Drag Sethlas

Blasphemous popular art and the religious/secular divide before the Spanish court

Anne-Marie Korte

Introduction

On 27 February 2017, a young Spanish primary school teacher, Borja Casillas, won first prize in one of the biggest Drag Queen Galas organised in Spain every year, acting as his drag persona, Drag Sethlas. In the carnival period in Las Palmas on the island of Gran Canaria, in the open air before an audience of 6,000 people, he performed a show named "My darling! I don't do miracles, may it be what God wants" (VaLen 2017). In this show, Casillas offered a three-and-a-half-minute spectacular performance in which s/he started as the Virgin Mary, appearing majestic in the style of a *Semana Santa* procession's statue, above the head of several procession members who also played a role in this show. S/he subsequently changed into Jesus Christ on the cross, again as part of the procession, while singing songs by pop stars Madonna and Lady Gaga, praying the *Our Father*, and dancing provocatively to the *Lord of the Night* by Juan Magan. The almost immediate official reaction to this performance was condemnation by Monsignor Francisco Cases, the bishop of the diocese of the Canarias, who lamented what he designated the "blasphemous frivolity" of the Drag Queen Gala and Casillas' act particularly (El País 2017; Martin 2017). The Spanish Episcopal Conference (the national bishops' conference) confirmed this statement. More than 33,000 people signed a petition urging the organisers of the Las Palmas carnival to take responsibility for failing to respect Christians and their faith (Govan 2017). The Spanish Association of Christian Lawyers called for Casillas to be prosecuted for "crimes against religious sentiment", which indeed took place and took almost 18 months to be settled (El Mundo 2017). Borja Casillas was ultimately acquitted because the Spanish court acknowledged that the context of the carnival should be seen as decisive for understanding Casillas' act. This made the court declare that there was no offensive intentionality in this performance, and therefore no punishable act, mainly because, in this specific context, artistic and transgressive aims were allowed because of the carnival period (Reina 2018; La Sexta 2018).