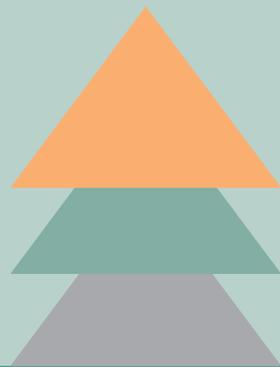# Religions and Development
Research Programme

Gender Studies Approaches to the Relationships between Religion and Development

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Religions and Development
Research Programme

The Religions and Development Research Programme Consortium is an international research partnership that is exploring the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction. The programme is comprised of a series of comparative research projects that are addressing the following questions:

- How do religious values and beliefs drive the actions and interactions of individuals and faith-based organisations?
- How do religious values and beliefs and religious organisations influence the relationships between states and societies?
- In what ways do faith communities interact with development actors and what are the outcomes with respect to the achievement of development goals?

The research aims to provide knowledge and tools to enable dialogue between development partners and contribute to the achievement of development goals. We believe that our role as researchers is not to make judgements about the truth or desirability of particular values or beliefs, nor is it to urge a greater or lesser role for religion in achieving development objectives. Instead, our aim is to produce systematic and reliable knowledge and better understanding of the social world.

The research focuses on four countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania), enabling the research team to study most of the major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and African traditional belief systems. The research projects will compare two or more of the focus countries, regions within the countries, different religious traditions and selected development activities and policies.

The consortium consists of six research partner organisations, each of which is working with other researchers in the four focus countries:

- University of Birmingham, UK: International Development Department, Department of Theology and Religion, Centre for West African Studies, Centre for the Study of Global Ethics, Department of Political Science and International Relations
- University of Bath, UK: Centre for Development Studies
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi.
- Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan.
- University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan

In addition to the research partners, links have been forged with non-academic and non-government bodies, including Islamic Relief.

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Religions and Development
Working Paper 8

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Contents

1 Introduction

The first part of this literature review introduces the main concepts and theoretical frameworks underpinning a gender-based approach to development. Mainstream work in the area of 'gender and development' is primarily concerned with issues such as the social differences between men and women, the economic marginalisation of women, or violence against women as a product of gender bias. However, studies in this field have, on the whole, not taken the impact of religious values, beliefs and organisations upon gender relations seriously: considerations of religion are not a particularly central feature of this approach to development. 'Gender and development' discourse is typically both materialist and secularist (reflecting the dominant development paradigm). Religion is often cited as an impediment to women's access to employment, health care or education, but the dynamics of this interaction are less often the research focus. In the mainstream development literature, there is a failure to engage with the ways in which some feminists across the globe seek to transform their traditions as a source of empowerment, as well as a lack of interest in the ways in which religion can inform alternative, sometimes more culturally appropriate, understandings of development.

The second part of the literature review discusses research that is concerned with the impact of religion upon the types of concerns that form the content of gender-development debates. This research has been carried out in a range of disciplines (e.g. sociology, religious studies, politics, anthropology, health studies, law) but has not tended to inform either the theory or practice of mainstream gender and development work to any great extent. Gender and development is already an interdisciplinary field of study and as such it is methodologically difficult to distinguish it from work in disciplines such as those listed above. However, in terms of course content within academic programmes and key publications, as well as policy and practice that have a distinct gender and development identity, attention to religious issues (e.g. values, practices and institutions) has been scarce. The literature that I discuss in the second section of this review has a relevance to what is known as 'gender and development', but exists at the margins of its focus and activity. I have mainly reviewed literature that is focussed upon South Asia and Africa, since these regions are the main focus of the 'Religions and Development' programme (which deals specifically with India, Pakistan, Tanzania and Nigeria).[1] I will conclude this review with an evaluation of gaps in the literature and a suggestion for directions for future research.

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[1] Literature on Latin America, South-East and East Asia has not been reviewed.

2 Women, gender and development

The publication of Ester Boserup's book *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) is widely heralded as marking the beginnings of recognition that women are central to the development process and that without considering the subordinate position of women, poor countries are likely to remain poor. This was also the first study to highlight that in many contexts the development process actually has a negative effect on women's lives and was soon accompanied by an interest within the international development community to find ways that women could be integrated into the development process. This 'women in development' (WID) approach began to challenge the 'trickle down' theory of development, since women did not seem to be benefiting greatly from development initiatives. In many cases the development process was passing women by and at times it actually made their situation worse. However, WID analysis did not tackle the underlying structural reasons for gender oppression. Instead, it relied upon the assumption that increasing women's opportunities (e.g. education or employment) would be sufficient to end gender discrimination. Neither did it problematise the inherent gender bias within the western development project itself (see Hedman et al, 1996; Jackson and Pearson, 1998; Moser, 1993; Pearson, 2000; Rathgeber, 1990 for a discussion of the limitations of WID).

The WID approach was characterised by a focus upon women-centred projects, which, it was argued, failed to address the underlying reasons for women's oppression. In *Gender Planning and Development* (1993) Moser makes a distinction between women's 'practical' and 'strategic' gender needs to argue that, while development ought to cater for women's 'practical' needs, such as access to employment, education or health care, this alone will not necessarily enable women to enhance their 'strategic' position within the gender hierarchy.[2] Thus, "strategic gender needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society…They relate to gender divisions of labour, power and control and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies" (1993, p. 39). By contrast, "practical gender needs do not challenge the gender divisions of labour or women's subordinate position in society. Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity…and are often concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care and employment" (1993, p. 40). In the same book Moser identifies five main 'stages' that have shaped the engagement of the development community with women/gender. The first four stages (welfare, equity, anti-poverty and

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[2] See also Molyneux (1998). Molyneux talks about women's practical and strategic gender 'interests'. Moser translated this into 'needs', arguing that this was a clearer way of articulating the distinction to planners (1993).

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efficiency) are WID approaches that treat women as isolated agents who can be slotted into pre-existing development projects and agendas. The equity approach, for instance, (which came in the wake of the publication of Boserup's book and around the time of the first UN decade for women – 1976-85) focused upon gaining equity for women in the development process and argued for legislative changes to improve opportunities for women to study and work. Although this approach was radical, in promoting women's equality with men, many criticised it as 'western feminism'. Moreover, it assumed that equality could be achieved through enabling women to access additional resources without addressing the gender relations that gave rise to the lack of access in the first place. Moser's fifth approach is concerned with 'empowerment' and reflects the efforts of women in developing countries to find ways of transforming their situation from the bottom up. These feminists argue that women's oppression in poor countries is not just a condition of patriarchy but that colonial and post-colonial factors are complicit. An organisation called 'Development Alternatives for a New Era' (DAWN, established in1984) has been prominent within this approach and has argued that the very models of development themselves must be transformed into a more holistic and equitable approach.

Pearson (2000) suggests that DAWN signalled a shift from a 'women in development' (WID) approach to a 'women and development' (WAD) approach. Drawing upon dependency theory, the development process itself (which is structurally biased in favour of the north) is seen as problematic, not merely women's exclusion from it. However, the WAD approach has also been challenged for not adequately considering the impact of patriarchy: it tends to assume that once the international system becomes more equitable, women's position will improve. Another way of thinking about the limitations of WID and WAD is that they do not engage with 'gender' – with the socially constructed relations between men and women. By the 1980s we find a third approach emerging (in both theory and practice): 'gender and development' (GAD). According to Moser:

> "the WID approach…is based upon the underlying rationale that development processes would proceed much better if women were fully incorporated into them (instead of being left to use their time 'unproductively'). It focuses mainly on women in isolation, promoting measures such as access to credit and employment as the means by which women can be better integrated into the development process. In contrast, the GAD approach maintains that to focus on women in isolation is to ignore the real problem, which remains their subordinate status to men. In insisting that women cannot be viewed in isolation, it emphasized a focus on gender relations when designing measures to 'help' women in the development process" (Moser, 1993, p. 3).

Moser argues that development agencies and governments are more likely to adopt a WID-like approach since it is less 'threatening' and challenging (1993). However, it is an add-on rather than an integrative approach. Gender analysis, by contrast, has emancipation and empowerment as its goal and is more challenging and confrontational (Geisler et al, 1999). It not only requires that gender relations are questioned within particular cultures but also within development projects and the international agencies that oversee the development process (Kabeer, 1994). It is important, however, when looking at definitions and accounts of GAD, to be aware of gaps between theory and practice. For instance, as Visvananthan writes, "GAD focuses not just on women (as with WID and WAD), but on the social relations between men and women in the work place as well as in other settings. GAD uses gender relations rather than 'women' as a category of analysis and views men as potential supporters of women" (Visvananthan, 1997, p. 23. In practice, however, almost all of GAD still tends to focus on women. However, it stresses the social rather than biological construction of gender. Moreover, within each approach there is much more internal diversity in practice than phrases such as 'the GAD approach' might suggest.

During the 1990s it became common to talk about 'gender mainstreaming' (Baden and Goetz, 1998; Jahan, 1995). As Baden and Goetz write: "mainstreaming signifies a push towards systematic procedures and mechanisms within organisations – particularly government and public institutions - for explicitly taking account of gender issues at all stages of policy-making and programme design and implementation" (1998, p. 20). With respect to procedures, this articulates the view that gender analysis should become integral to policy making and that gender bias should be avoided in projects. All the major (western) development agencies have taken on board the importance of gender analysis (e.g. DFID, 2000; World Bank, 2000; UNDP, 1995). An important aspect of gender mainstreaming has been the emergence of gender planning and training methods – which aim to ensure gender sensitivity within policy and projects (Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 2000; Macdonald, 1994; Moser, 1993; Seed, 1999). Some methods are considered to more closely reflect the WID approach and to be top-down (e.g. The Harvard Analytical Framework/Gender Roles Framework/Gender Analysis Framework see Overholt et al, 1984; Overholt, 1991). Others are consciously gender-focused and participatory (e.g. Gender Analysis Matrix). Organisationally, the earlier and most common approach focussed on the creation of a specific organisational structure concerned with women – a Ministry of Women's Affairs or WID unit. However, as Moser writes: "a decade of experience has shown that the 'top-down'…

creation of the WID Unit has not institutionalized WID. Most frequently it has simply been co-opted into the dominant organizational structure. In the past few years, therefore, organizational structures have focused attention on the development of collaborative, bottom-up processes within their structures" (1993, p. 130). Today, WID or GAD units may remain, on the basis that the continued disadvantaged position of women revealed by gender analysis persists and the limited progress in addressing it in policy formulation and implementation necessitates the ongoing existence of a specific unit. However, there are often parallel attempts to mainstream gender into analysis and policy throughout the organisational structures of development agencies – donors, governments and NGOs.

Some have, however, argued that this widespread adoption of GAD has resulted in a watering down of its transformative potential: it becomes another box to tick rather than a position that is deeply held and understood by individuals assigned to GAD work. As Pearson writes: "it is widely accepted in these times that development must be informed by gender analysis and that particular attention must be paid to the needs of poor women – so much so that such positions have become commonplace rather than radical; indeed, many would argue that the ways in which gender matters have been integrated into development thinking and practice indicate a high degree of co-option of politicized feminist objectives rather than their success in transforming the development agenda" (Pearson, 2000, p. 383; Smyth, 1998).

The above section has outlined the main trends that have occurred in a gender approach to development. The shift from WID to GAD has brought about a closer focus upon the nature and origins of gender discrimination in developing countries (e.g. it has become more political and strategic), but has tended to reply upon secularist and materialist explanations and solutions. The literature outlined below currently exists on the margins of mainstream thinking in gender and development and is concerned with both the ways in which religious values, practices and institutions impact upon women's marginalization and oppression (e.g. in terms of employment, position in the household or exclusion from the political process), as well as the ways in which they can support various development social and economic transformations that benefit women. The increasing emphasis upon women's 'empowerment' within gender and development (a bottom-up approach popular since the 1990s) has begun to introduce a greater diversity of explanations of and activities to overcome women's disadvantage. While many of these share the secular/materialist feminist vision

that typified earlier 'northern' approaches, an emphasis on the religious and cultural dimension of women's lives is becoming more prominent. The following discussion will not deal with any of the non-academic literature on this topic (i.e. that produced from within religious organisations, FBOs etc). However, the empowerment motif is arguably encouraging a greater attention within academic studies upon the impact of religion and culture in the lives of poor women.

2.1 Religion and culture in 'gender and development'

On the whole, the context outlined above has not tended to foster a research agenda that is concerned with the impact of religion and culture upon women's lives in poor countries. Both WID and GAD were (and are) highly materialist in orientation, following the general development paradigm. There has been a strong 'religion as obstacle' tradition within gender studies, particularly in relation to Islam (e.g. see the work of Fatima Mernissi, 2003 [1975] and Nawal El Saadawi, 1997), but the cultural and religious components of women's oppression and gender hierarchies, as well as the potential of 'spiritual capital' (Iannaccone and Klick, 2003) to transform gender relations and empower women, are more often overlooked and remain under-theorised. While it is important not to reduce the subordination of women to religious or cultural causes, nor to essentialise poor women as particularly religious/spiritual, the literature review that follows will indicate the relevance of religio-cultural factors to many of the concerns that gender and development typically addresses. The second part of this literature review is divided into different sections dealing with some of the themes that are typically addressed within gender and development studies: reproductive choice; HIV/AIDS; female circumcision; human rights; fundamentalism and environmental resource management. The review will finish by identifying significant gaps in the literature as well as examining key conceptual and methodological issues revealed by the review.

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3   Themes

3.1 Reproductive choice and religion

Since the 1994 United Nations 'Population and Development Conference' in Cairo, the idea of reproductive rights has increasingly dominated discussions about issues around family planning (Grimes, 1998; Petchesky and Judd, 1998; Smyth, 1998). As Bandarage writes, the Cairo Conference indicated a shift to "a new and broader reproductive rights approach that is fundamentally different from the prevailing family planning and demographic approach to population" (Bandarage, 1998, p. 7). Literature within this field has addressed concerns about the ways in which 'conservative' religious traditions, particularly Catholicism and Islam, influence women's access to reproductive services, such as contraception and abortion. This can be in terms of the impact that religious values have upon the reproductive choices that women make themselves, as well as the ways in which religion can influence the availability of reproductive services through its impact upon broader social values and legal frameworks within particular countries. An edited volume by Bayes and Tohidi (2001) includes chapters from different countries that deal with the ways in which women's human rights (with a particular focus upon reproductive rights) have been influenced by religion. The first two sections of the book – written by Bayes and Tohidi – provide an interesting discussion of support for President Reagan's 'Mexico City Policy' (more recently reincarnated as the so-called 'global gag rule'[3]) from both the Pope and some Muslim leaders. They suggest that a strategic Muslim-Catholic alliance has emerged, which was particularly visible at the 1995 Beijing women's conference and continues to be suspicious of current thinking about reproductive rights. This 'conservative' backlash, moreover, does not just include men but also has support amongst individual women and some women's in groups in both the North and the South.

Couture (2003) also discusses this theme through an analysis of religious speeches made during the 1995 Beijing women's conference. The author is concerned with the way that these speeches represent women's human rights. She notes that a number of Islamic and Catholic participants argued that women's reproductive choices should be defined by religious values. This points to a tension within the international women's movement between universal rights and cultural/religious particularisms. Similarly, Vuola (2002) looks at the impact of religious fundamentalism upon

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[3] See Crane and Dusenberry (2004). The relationship between this policy – which prohibits any organisation that advocates abortion from receiving US government funding – and conservative Christian values has been well documented. In particular, the link between President Bush's personal religious convictions and the anti-abortion lobby has created controversy and concern.

international discourses about women's human rights, particularly reproductive rights. She suggests that the deconstruction of religious fundamentalism should be central to the feminist critique of religion, yet this has not been generally taken up by feminist social scientists. Articles by Amin and Hossain (1995) and El Dawla (2000)[4] take up these issues in country studies. El Dawla, for instance, discusses the translation of the language of reproductive rights into an Egyptian cultural context, and explores the role of tradition and religion as well as the law (see also Bowen, 1997; Hasna, 2003; Kazimov, 2003; Obermeyer, 1994). Borland (2004), in *Cultural opportunity and tactical choice in the Argentine and Chilean reproductive rights movements*, argues that the Catholic Church is seen as the main opponent of those campaigning for reproductive rights, including abortion. Activism is more confrontational in Argentina, where social support for the church is weak. By contrast, in Chile the links between society and the Church are stronger and a more cautious pattern of activism has emerged.[5]

There is also a body of literature that investigates the relationship between religion and fertility. BeitHallahmi and Bonus (1997) argue that the high fertility rate in underdeveloped countries (which, they suggest, contributes towards population growth and economic stagnation) is in part a result of women's low status in society, which is often sanctioned by religious traditions. They suggest that education is the key factor in reducing women's fertility. Moulasha and Rao (1999) discuss the reasons for a higher fertility rate amongst Muslim than Hindu women in India. Their study is based upon data from the *National Family Health Survey* and they conclude that the higher birth rate amongst Muslims (1.1 children are born to Muslim women for every 1 child born to Hindu women) is to do with their lower socio-economic position rather than the influence of religious beliefs. Bhagat and Praharaj (2005) also take up this issue. They discuss the impact of socio-economic factors as well as the influence of Islam upon women's decisions not to use contraception, concluding that Islamic beliefs *per se* are not the central factor. The Muslim community is in a minority in India and has a high level of illiteracy (nearly 50%), with the majority living below the poverty line. This suggests, they argue, that it is the socio-economic conditions within which Islam is practised, rather than Islamic theology itself, which deserves consideration, implying that women's reproductive choices are constrained mainly by their socio-economic situation and that religion is a 'secondary' factor (see also Basu, 2004 and Iyer, 2002). However, we ought to question the extent to which this preference for socio-economic explanations, at the expense of cultural factors, reflects the general materialist view within western

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[4] This edition of the journal Reproductive Health Matters is concerned with reproductive rights.
[5] See also Barzelatto and Dawson (2003) and Tan (2004).

social science research. There is arguably a need for research that considers the combined influence of socio-economic and religio-cultural factors upon gender and development concerns, such as reproductive choice, rather than accepting the pre-eminence of one type of explanatory model above another.

Bhagat and Praharaj also highlight the practice of sex-selective abortion to eliminate female births, particularly by Hindu women (see also Borooah and Iyer, n.d.[6]), as a "crucial factor in the study of Hindu-Muslim fertility differentials" (Bhagat and Praharaj, 2005, p. 417). They suggest that the presence of higher rates of sex-selective abortion amongst Hindus means that even if Muslim women take up birth control methods, any fertility differentials are likely to remain. While the practices of sex selective abortion and female infanticide have been given economic explanations, other studies have argued that cultural factors (which advocate a preference for sons) must also be considered. These practices are particularly prevalent in India (amongst Hindus) and China (in response to the one child policy since 1979). In both these regions the sex ratio is 'masculine' (more men than women), whereas in most other parts of the globe it is 'feminine'. Amartya Sen (1990) has famously estimated that there are 100 million missing women. In South Asia the reversal of the sex ratio has also been associated with high levels of mortality amongst very young girls and women of childbearing age. As Harriss and Watson write "these levels have been related to the economic undervaluation and low relative social status of women" (1987, p. 86). Moreover, commentators are now becoming concerned that the more recent practice of sex selective abortion – following much easier access to amniocentesis tests – is exacerbating the problem in this region.

While studies do acknowledge the role of cultural attitudes that favour males over females, generally this cultural factor tends to be downplayed in favour of economic or socio-political explanations.[7] In fact, it is increasingly evident that we need an integration of these approaches. For example, although it is acknowledged that the view that it is auspicious for the first child to be a boy is a factor, the greater

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[6] In this article, Religion, Literacy, and the Female-to-Male Ratio in India, Borooah and Iyer discuss the impact of husbands' literacy upon women's decisions to abort female fetuses.

[7] To what extent is there a resistance to looking for religious explanations for such instances of violence against women, since this could then make it seem as though such customs have some justification? By this, I mean that if feminists argue that Hinduism, for instance, justifies son preference, then they could be seen as bolstering the argument of those who look to Hinduism to support son preference: they are in effect agreeing that Hindu beliefs support son preference. Arguably, this is playing into the hands of religious literalists, who refuse to acknowledge that religious ideas may be socially constructed. Thus, do feminist commentators prefer to analyse these issues in terms of materialist causes that can be more easily addressed by political, social, economic and legal measures?

expense of girls, because of the dowry[8] that has to be paid upon marriage, is accorded greater explanatory power. Such expenses, it is suggested, are often beyond the means of poor families, who will end up making the constrained choice to abort female foetuses or allow girl babies to die. Similarly, in China the Confucian tradition has a strong emphasis upon sons above daughters, for both cultural and economic reasons: sons are necessary to perform rituals to the ancestors and there is a cultural and economic expectation that sons will care for their parents in old age. Hence, the one child policy has had a negative impact upon the female population, since families would rather have one son that one daughter (Feng, 1996; Greenhalgh, 2001; Junhong, 2001; Li, 1995)[9].

While the discussion so far has concentrated upon Asia, there are also studies that investigate the relationship between religion and reproduction in Africa. Adongo et al. (1998) investigate whether or not family planning initiatives represent an affront to traditional religion among the Kassena-Nankana of northern Ghana – particularly since the traditional view dictates that people should have large families. In this study, the researchers first interviewed lineage heads of the Kassena-Nankana and then interviewed them again in the presence of soothsayers, who could elicit the views of the ancestors on questions about reproductive decisions. During the second set of interviews, the lineage heads were asking the opinion of the ancestors on the questions rather than giving their personal views. The aim of this was to mirror traditional decision-making processes within the community and to assess the difference between the personal views of the lineage heads and the views attributed to ancestral spirits. While their study revealed that, on the whole, both lineage heads and spirits preferred sons and large families, some of the ancestors wanted smaller families, as did some of the lineage heads. The authors argue that these findings are important, since they indicate that consultations with ancestral spirits can be "non-dogmatic, open to outside ideas, and subject to social and economic influences" (1998, p. 35). Thus the assumption in much of the literature on this topic that African Traditional Religion would act against family planning, since it favours large families, is not borne out by this example, which suggests that religious practices can be flexible and open to change. The authors argue that this approach to research and communication could be employed in other contexts

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[8] A question that frequently arises is the extent to which dowry is a religious custom. Some authors have argued that the tendency to see dowry and dowry death as 'Hindu' customs downplays the ways in which patriarchy is an influence on violence against women globally (Rudd, 2001). Narayan (1997) argues that there is also a strong sense in which the West romanticises and exoticises certain customs in India as religious, rather than seeing them as instances of violence against women (e.g.*sati* and dowry death).

[9] See also Ghuman (2003) and Remez (2003).

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where religion is strong: "reactions to the study suggest that [religious] mechanisms may be a productive means of communicating with men, soothsayers, and spirits about reproductive matters, gender issues, or other problems of concern to the Ministry of Health" (1998, p. 37).

Agadjanian (2001) examines how the social environment that exists in different religious congregations has had an impact upon the spread of contraceptive use in Mozambique. This study suggests that urban women belonging to the 'more socioculturally diverse and inclusive' Roman Catholic and mission-based Protestant congregations are more likely to use contraception than women belonging to the 'smaller, relatively homogeneous', independent churches. The article is particularly interesting, since it discusses the role of the churches in providing a space where women can discuss contraception issues as well as get advice from visiting health professionals. The notion that the Catholic Church in any context supports the use of contraception may seem to run against conventional wisdom, but the article seems to suggest that while abortion is still taboo, discussions about sexual health and contraception can "blend into more general discussions and advice on health matters such as person and household hygiene or HIV/AIDS and STD prevention" (2001, p. 139). This article is also significant because it focuses upon the social role of religion around a development issue as relatively separate from its ideological position (e.g. on reproductive rights). The author suggests that where it is normally assumed that high involvement in church practices would inspire someone to be pro-natalist, this study suggests the reverse. He writes that "religion largely defines the social environment in which women spend their time spared from outside-the-home work and household duties, and accordingly…women without a church membership and therefore without access to a diverse social milieu are…disadvantaged in contraceptive use" (2001, p. 146).[10]

Agadjanian (2001) suggests that religious differences in fertility are still very marginal in Mozambique, since it has not yet experienced the 'contraceptive revolution'. However, marked differences are noticeable in neighbouring Zimbabwe, which is more advanced in the uptake of family planning services: here we find a differential pattern that would seem to be predicted by the results of the Mozambique study. Gregson et al. similarly argue that "religion has acted as a brake on demographic transition in a number of historical and contemporary populations" (1999, p. 179) in rural Zimbabwe. They provide a study of two rural areas of Zimbabwe that reveals differences between religious

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[10] This article and Adongo et al. (1998) are examples of the potential for religion to promote social change in a direction that goes against conventional wisdom.

congregations: birth rates are higher in 'spirit-type' (independent) churches than they are in Protestant mission contexts. The 'spirit-type' churches are more traditional in their teachings about contraception and reproduction and also more conservative in their attitudes towards sex in general. The authors observe that there is a lower incidence of HIV amongst the congregations of these churches and they wonder whether this might in the future encourage people to convert into the 'spirit' churches. Avong (2001) provides a study carried out amongst 600 Atyap women in Kaduna State, Nigeria, which found that Catholics and 'Other Protestants' (Anglicans and Baptists) have higher fertility than women affiliated to the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA). Avong also argues that, above and beyond the denominational differences, the 'stronger the religious belief, the higher the fertility'. Whereas the above studies focus on the impact of religion upon reproductive choice, Addai (1999, 2000) suggests that in most cases differentials in contraceptive use between different religious groups can be explained in terms of women's socioeconomic and demographic status, rather than their religious affiliation. Differentials in the use of contraceptives by religion are examined: Catholic, Protestant, Other Christian, Muslim, no religion, and Traditional. Only in the case of urban 'Other Christian' women did religion itself emerge as a significant determinant of contraceptive use. The policy implications of these results are discussed (see also Kohler et al, 2001; Rasmussen, 1998).

The above section has reviewed some of the literature that is concerned with the links between religion and women's reproductive choices. With respect to issues such as abortion and contraception, 'conservative' religious values often clash with the values that underpin secular feminist approaches to women's choices in matters relating to their fertility and reproductive health. The literature also suggests that religion can play a role in decisions about family size and the preferred sex of children. However, many of the studies reviewed also emphasise that religious factors do not operate in isolation from material conditions. Finally, some studies suggest a role for the social capital dimension of religion, in which participation in a religious organisation can provide a space for education about fertility and the use of contraception.

3.2 HIV/AIDS and religion

The impact of religion on the spread of HIV and AIDS, particularly in Africa, has received some attention[11] and a section of this literature looks at the gendered dimension of the interaction. However,

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[11] Garner (2000); Grey (2004); Lagarde et al. (2000); Smith (2003; 2004); UNAIDS (1998). See also Kirby (1993).

Takyi (2003) tells us that there has been a limited amount of reflection upon the ways in which women's religious affiliation influences their knowledge of and attempts to protect themselves from HIV. Throughout African countries, significantly higher numbers of women suffer from HIV and AIDS than men,[12] and this is normally accounted for by the fact that it is easier for women to contract the virus as well as by the high incidence of male infidelity. Unequal gender relations make it more difficult for women to negotiate safe sex with their partners even if they suspect infidelity. The practice of polygamy (within Islam and African traditional religion), as well as female genital mutilation (see below), is also likely to have some impact upon women's vulnerability (Human Rights Watch, 2003). While education is generally considered to be the most fundamental way of improving women's knowledge about HIV, the impact of religio-cultural traditions can both help and hinder attempts at increasing AIDS awareness. A number of studies draw attention to attitudes and practices linked to religion, tradition or culture that can make women more vulnerable to HIV (e.g. FGM, polygamy, piercing of the skin by traditional healers for the protection of women and unborn children, women being blamed for bringing infection into a family, etc., see Latre-Gato Lawson, 1999).

Whereas many of these studies concentrate upon secular education as the key to improving HIV awareness and prevention, tending to see religion/culture as 'backward' and as part of the problem (which undoubtedly it often is), Takyi's research (2003) draws attention to the social capital role of religion (in particular its networks and institutions) as providing a route for the dissemination of information about HIV/AIDS. While his study revealed a positive link between women's religious participation and knowledge about HIV/AIDS (compared to those who were non-religious), this knowledge did not translate into changes in behaviour, especially when it came to condom use. Another study, by Chikwendu (2004), looks at the role of faith-based organizations in anti-HIV/AIDS work among African youth and women. She notes a number of strengths that FBOs feel that they possess "for fighting poverty, disease and HIV/AIDS" (2004, p. 311): they are part of a global network; they provide a 'holistic ministry' (in addressing the physical, spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals and communities); and they have a track record over decades of dealing with the outcome of "conflict, natural disasters, political oppression and plague" (2004, p. 312). She is critical of the Catholic Church, in particular, for failing to address the benefits of condom use in preventing the spread of HIV, and notes that, although some Catholic groups now allow the use of condoms, this is

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[12] Four out of every five HIV positive women in the world live in Africa; and 58% of those who are HIV positive in Africa are women (Chikwendu, 2004: 309).

not widespread. She also suggests that the churches' male hierarchical structure can make it difficult for women and the young to take on board messages about AIDS prevention, since church leaders 'preach down to their congregations'. Moreover, she suggests, the male clergy find it difficult to talk about sexual matters and tend to contribute towards the stigmatization of people living with the disease.

However, she also suggests that many churches have begun to revise their approach to HIV/AIDS in the light of such critiques. She discusses two networks that have formed: the 'African Forum of Faith-Based Organizations in Reproductive Heath and HIV/AIDS' and 'Churches United in the Struggle against HIV/AIDS in Southern and Eastern Africa'. The paper then examines different international and local initiatives by faith communities in HIV/AIDS prevention and care. She discusses the work of the Catholic Relief Services (CRS - US based) and the Church World Service (CWS – US based) in a number of locations, including Nigeria and Tanzania. She also discusses several Africa based Christian organisations. While this is an interesting article, it does not really focus upon women and youth as the title suggests, nor does it follow through a discussion of whether those Christian organisations which have become involved in AIDS work advocate condoms or not. Since both of the international organisations that she discusses are North American, one would expect that they have also been affected by the 'global gag', yet this is not mentioned.

The 'global gag' on any organisation which receives US funding (although this does not apply to governments) is concerned with abortion rather than condom use.[13] However, the gag also extends to organisations that may wish to support pro-abortion campaigns (in places where it is not legal). Some organisations have opted to reject US funding to enable them to support pro-abortion campaigns, but this has a knock-on impact upon their ability to maintain services in other areas of sexual and reproductive health – including HIV/AIDS prevention and care (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2003; Cohen, 2002, 2003; Crane and Dusenberry, 2004; Hwang, 2002; Kort, 2003; Miller and Billings, 2005).

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[13] The global gag itself is an aspect of links between gender, religion and development.

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3.3 Female circumcision (Female Genital Mutilation – FGM) and religion

Female circumcision is predominantly carried out in African countries, including Nigeria and Tanzania (Caldwell et al, 1997; Klouman et al, 2005) and the literature on this topic is mainly concerned with 'FGM' as a human rights and health issue (e.g. the operation is often performed in unhygienic conditions, childbirth can become very difficult and there is a higher likelihood of contracting HIV). However, the belief that it is an Islamic practice is widespread not only in Africa but elsewhere. While female circumcision is not condoned in the Qur'an, the practice is advocated in several *hadith* (sayings of the prophet, see Wiggins, 2001), although many consider these to be 'weak' *hadith* (Muslim Women's League, 1999). The practice in fact predates Islam and is deeply embedded in cultural understandings of sex and womanhood that are held by both men and women (e.g. the belief that female circumcision makes a woman a better wife or that without it a newborn baby can be harmed). Moreover, it is not only carried out by Muslims in Africa, but also by members of other religious traditions. Nevertheless, the perception that it is Islamic is one which many seek to debunk in order to weaken the cultural hold of the practice (for example, this is likely to be a strategy utilised by Islamic feminists).[14] For instance, El-Gibaly et al. (2002), writing about the persistence of the practice in Egypt, tell us that it is still widespread for a number of reasons: the belief that it moderates female sexuality, the belief that it will ensure a girl's marriagability and the understanding that it is sanctioned by Islam. (They also suggest that the campaign against FGM, which gained momentum after the 1994 UN population conference in Cairo, has corresponded with a decrease in the practice in Egypt). While some argue that the practice goes against a woman's human rights and should be banned, others maintain that circumcision is an important rite of passage for African women and that western feminist condemnation is misplaced (Emeagwali, 1996; and the websites of Women Living Under Muslims Laws and Women Against Fundamentalisms).[15]

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[14] For studies on FGM see: Amnesty International (1998) Abu Daia (2000); Dorkenoo (1995); Dorkenoo and Elworthy (1992); Hicks (1996); Kelly and Hillard (2005); Robinson (1998)
[15] **http://www.wluml.org/english/index.shtml** and **http://waf.gn.apc.org/** accessed 2/2/07.

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3.4 Women's human rights and religion[16]

The debate about the extent to which human rights discourse reflects a western value system is also taken up more broadly within the literature on gender and religion (Howland, 2001; Peters and Wolper, 1995). The main area where this has been explored is with respect to Islam and women's rights. While some studies are critical of the ways in which Islam can be used to restrict women's rights and thus advocate a secular approach to rights, others emphasise the potential benefits of finding correlates for rights within Islam (Afkhami and Friedl, 1977; Afkhami, 1995; Ali, 2000; Donno and Russet, 2004; Drumbl, 2004; Engineer, 1998; Jawad, 1998; Kardam, 2005; Nussbaum, 2000; Sechzer, 2004). Thus, religion is seen as a barrier to women's human rights but also as an important vehicle for changing attitudes that obstruct the realisation of rights. However, most commentators are agreed that the way Islam is understood in many contexts today needs to be challenged and critiqued. Mashhour (2005), for instance, argues that the Islamic texts are supportive of women's rights and that the 'decline' in women's status in many Islamic contexts is a product of patriarchy rather than Islam itself. The challenge is how to disentangle patriarchal values from their justification as Islamic and how to promote alternative (many would argue 'authentic') interpretations of Islam that are supportive of women's human rights. 'Feminist' organisations, such as Sisters of Islam in Malaysia, are undertaking such interpretive work as well as working at the grass roots level to transmit more egalitarian versions of Islam to women (Foley, 2004; Sleboda, 2001).

Other scholars are concerned with the increasing Islamisation of certain predominantly Muslim countries. In Nigeria, for instance, the adoption of Shariah law in the north of the country since 2000 has been shown to act to women's disadvantage. Kalu (2003), for instance, discusses recent well-publicised cases where women found guilty of adultery have been sentenced to death by stoning (this has been adopted as an Islamic response to adultery).[17] Behrouz (2003) discusses uneven inheritance practices in the north of Nigeria. However, she suggests that it is important to encourage Muslims themselves to reform unjust Islamic practices rather than imposing universal human rights standards from the outside. Mullally (2005) argues that in Pakistan, although the constitution supports equal rights for all, the ascendancy of conservative religious values has meant that women's rights have been curtailed. She investigates the strategies pursued by feminist movements in Pakistan in

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[16] See Tomalin (2007a) for a discussion of 'religion and human rights'.
[17] See also Adamu (2004); Benedek et al. (2002); Miles (2003).

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attempting to counteract the impact of conservative Islamist movements. These include the renegotiation of religious-cultural norms. Khan (2003) is interested in women who have been imprisoned for *zina* (illicit sex; see also Hadi, 2003; Mullally, 2005) and ways that feminists seek to address such unjust laws. Weiss (2003) investigates attempts to implement CEDAW (UN convention on all forms of discrimination against women, 1979) in Pakistan (which is party to the convention).

Similar debates have been taken up with respect to other religious traditions. For instance, debates about the Catholic Church and women's human rights have most heavily focussed upon issues to do with reproductive rights (see above). The preference for sons in the Hindu tradition is considered by some to have an impact upon broader social attitudes towards women (as well as being part of the complex of factors which encourage sex selective abortions and female infanticide as widespread reproductive options). The law in India considers women to be equal to men, but the cultural devaluing of women *vis a vis* men (son preference is also a feature of Islamic culture) does have an impact upon the way in which the law is implemented, as well as encouraging violent crimes against women to be committed in the first place.

Considering the current emphasis upon rights-based approaches to development, a greater sensitivity towards the potential for values like rights within different cultural traditions would benefit the development process. There are many studies which suggest that the articulation of rights as secular, universal values fails to resonate with the worldviews that shape social ethics in many non-western contexts (see Tomalin, 2006). Moreover, this arguably increases the likelihood of a backlash against human rights, including women's rights, in certain post-colonial contexts. This has not been adequately explored within development studies.

3.5 Women and fundamentalism

Since the early 1990s, a research agenda has emerged that is concerned with the impact of religious fundamentalism upon the lives of women across the globe (Brink and Mencher, 1997; Franks, 2001; Gerami, 1996; Hawley, 1994a; Howland, 2001; Jeffery and Basu, 1998; Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Sarkar, 2001; Sarkar and Butalia, 1995). In general, however, religious fundamentalism has tended to emerge most strongly in poorer regions, thus impacting upon the lives of women (and men) in developing countries to a greater degree than in the west. Religious fundamentalists tend to hold that

men and women's roles are tied to their biology and to use a strict form of biological determinism to constrain women's freedoms and activities. This is backed up by reference to 'tradition', especially textual tradition: the texts are to be taken literally. Fundamentalists' goals are largely incompatible with those of western feminism and are sometimes articulated in direct opposition to feminist ideas. However, it is not only men who support fundamentalist religion (e.g. see Jeffery and Basu, 1998) and it is important to recognise that women may also subvert fundamentalist constructions of gender to their own ends (Burdick, 1992; Marshall, 1991).

The word fundamentalist is often used rather loosely and is not a term that so-called 'fundamentalists' generally use in self-designation. While today it is invariably used in a pejorative sense, the original meaning of the term held no such critical overtones. It is useful to distinguish the term as used to describe a generic or worldwide phenomenon from the term as it was originally used to refer to a specific Protestant religious movement in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The original term 'Fundamentalism' was first encountered in a series of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915 in the USA: these were entitled 'The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth'. The Fundamentalist movement emerged in response to the perceived challenges arising from Darwinism and the liberalism of German biblical criticism, and was an attempt to bring Protestant Christianity back to its roots in the bible. As Hawley and Proudfoot write, in its most basic use 'fundamentalists' are:

> "American Protestants with a militant desire to defend religion against the onslaughts of modern, secular culture; their principal weapon is their insistence on the inerrancy of scripture. As for the enemy – the worldview propagated by secular naturalism or 'scientific humanism', as fundamentalists often call it – its most obvious manifestations are the theory of evolution and the methods of 'higher' textual criticism, as applied to sacred texts. Both raise questions about the inherent correctness of the Bible" (1994, p. 3).

Brasher (1998) draws attention to the writing of Betty DeBerg who, in her 1990 book *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*, argues that the role of gender in early Christian fundamentalism was not only concerned with establishing normative roles for women in the family, but that this interest in gender was itself central to the emergence of the movement. Moreover, the way that these early fundamentalists spoke about women suggests a backlash against the

expanding rights of women at the turn of the twentieth century. Although the term was born within the context of Protestant fundamentalism in the USA, it is now used in a comparative sense: it has increasingly become "the natural point of reference for describing religious resurgency around the world…The usage took hold first in the press and in relation to Islam, and it has expanded in widening circles ever since" (Hawley and Proudfoot, 1994, p. 17). However, fundamentalism has become a loaded word and is now one rarely used by people to describe themselves. As Hawley and Proudfoot suggest, it is frequently used to describe those who "crudely contrast to the even-handed, pluralist, liberal approach *we* would prefer to take" (1994, p. 18, emphasis added).

Despite problems with the term, it is widely used and accepted as a label for a particular modern style of religiosity. Marty and Appleby (1991)[18] observe that there are 'family resemblances' between different examples of what might be called fundamentalism. These include:

1. Religious idealism as an "irreducible basis for communal and personal identity" (1991, p. 817);
2. Fundamentalists understand revealed truth to be "whole, unified and undifferentiated" (1991, p. 818);
3. It is intentionally scandalous (i.e. it aims to be 'shocking');
4. Fundamentalists envision themselves as part of "an eschatological drama unfolding in the mind of God and directing the course of history" (1991, p. 819);
5. They seize on historical moments and reinterpret them in light of this 'eschatological drama' or cosmic struggle;
6. They "name, dramatize, and even mythologise their enemies" (1991, p. 821).
7. They selectively stress parts of their tradition and heritage;
8. They are led by males;
9. "They envy modernist cultural hegemony and try to overturn the distribution of power".[19]

Until the mid to late 1990s there was little emphasis upon the role that gender plays within religious fundamentalism. By contrast, the website for the organisation 'Women against Fundamentalisms' (founded in 1989) tells us that:

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[18] The multi-authored 'Fundamentalism Project' was funded by The American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Five volumes were produced, and although the authors admit that they found the term fundamentalism problematic, they decided to adopt it, since it is already in widespread use and, in their opinion, is the best term to describe the subject matter.

[19] **http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/fund.html** accessed 2/2/07.

> "Fundamentalism appears in different and changing forms in religions throughout the world, sometimes as a state project, sometimes in opposition to the state. But at the heart of all fundamentalist agendas is the control of women's minds and bodies. All religious fundamentalists support the patriarchal family as a central agent of such control. They view women as embodying the morals and traditional values of the family and the whole community".[20]

Hawley and Proudfoot (1994) give some reasons why gender, and a particular construction of gender, is important for fundamentalist groups:

i. The role of women as dangerous 'others'

Often in religious traditions, women are considered to be a cause of evil, corruption or danger. As Hawley and Proudfoot write:

> "For every text that places well-domesticated woman-hood on a religious pedestal, another one announces that, if uncontrolled, women are the root of all evil; and to the perception of many fundamentalists the loosening of women is a prominent feature of modern western secularism. Thus, the focus of chaos is transferred from an external other to a familiar one" (1994, p. 27).

ii. Woman as part of a nostalgia for an idealised past

> "Since men primarily control the construction of this idealized past, their solution is to portray the women who inhabit it as self-sacrificing and generous" (1994, p. 30).

Women also play a role in symbolising motherhood, which is an important symbol for fundamentalist groups that feel alienated from modern society.

iii. Religious machismo

This relates to the idea that men need to reassert their masculinity in the light of threats. For this to succeed, symbolic or real women who can be protected are necessary (e.g. the importance of 'Mother India' to Hindu Nationalism).

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[20] **http://waf.gn.apc.org/discuss.htm** accessed 2/2/07.

Since the mid to late 1990s, we find the emergence of a substantial body of literature on gender and fundamentalism. The main areas research has focused on are Islamic fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalism, the latter particularly in the USA. For this review, the literature search focused upon gender and religious fundamentalism in developing contexts. However, the strength of Christian fundamentalism and its strategic alliance with the current government in North America (including its influence upon US foreign policy, for instance, the 'global gag' rule) means that it has some relevance to developing countries. The largest number of articles revealed by my search relate to Islam: for example Helie, 2004 and Rawi, 2004 (Afghanistan); Soares, 2006 (Mali); Jamal, 2005 (Pakistan); Afary, 1997; Gerami and Lehnerer, 2001; Moaddel, 1998, 2002; Lachenmann, 2004 (Senegal); Afshar, 1994 and Masoud, 2002 (Iran)). With respect to South Asia, a number of volumes investigate the participation of women in fundamentalist or religious nationalist movements, as well as the ways in which these movements rely upon particular conceptions of the 'feminine' (Jeffery and Basu, 1998; Sarkar, 2001; Sarkar and Butalia, 1995). Bracke (2003) also discusses the issue of women's involvement in fundamentalist movements in terms of a tension between notions of agency and constrained choice or 'false consciousness'.

Another important issue that is raised in the literature concerns the ways in which women reinterpret their religious traditions to counter fundamentalism, rather than adopting secular western feminism as the only alternative. This debate has emerged most strongly with respect to the emergence of various forms of Islamic feminism, which argue for improved conditions for women but with reference to Islam (Moghadam, 2001, 2002). Within debates about religious fundamentalism and gender, it is important to make a distinction between various expressions of 'religious feminism' (which may not hold identical goals to western feminism) and religious fundamentalisms that support violence against women (particularly in terms of punishment for transgressing religious norms) or that impose rules that limit women's freedoms in terms of access to education and healthcare. While some religious feminists emphasise that their traditions do not fundamentally discriminate between men and women, others argue that their religious traditions consider that women have a different role to men (although this does not mean that they are not equal to men: they are equal yet different). This assertion presents difficulties for the dominant approach within gender analysis, which maintains the social constructedness of all gendered difference and which tends to emphasise that difference will be used to justify oppression or subordination. The perception that the type of gender equality pursued by

western, secular feminists is a political value judgement has emerged as a critique within many Muslim contexts. This is a view not only articulated by so-called fundamentalists but also by those who seek to secure human rights or women's rights within as Islamic framework. For instance, one of the most debated issues within this discourse is the veil. While many western feminists are inclined to consider the veil as oppressive, Islamic feminists (as well as many fundamentalists) argue in its favour (Cooke, 2002; Yegenoglu, 2002).

Another area of concern has been the way in which the plight of women in fundamentalist contexts has been used to justify or soften particular military campaigns by the west, against Muslim countries in particular. Stabile and Kumar (2005) draw attention to the ways in which women in Afghanistan were represented in the western media as in need of liberation by the west: they are concerned that "Afghan women figure in imperialist agendas in a thoroughly Orientalist manner" (2005, p. 765: Ahmed, 1992). This does not, of course, imply that violence is not committed against women under a fundamentalism regime (or that violence against women can at least partially be explained in terms of religious factors more broadly). Hajjar (2004) focuses upon domestic violence in Muslim societies in the Middle East, Africa and Asia and investigates the interplay between four factors in each context: Shariah (Islamic law), state power, intra-family violence and struggles over women's rights. She concludes that, although Shariah creates "some commonalities in gender and family relations in Muslim societies, notably the sanctioning and maintenance of male authority over female relatives…the most important issue for understanding domestic violence and impunity is the relationship between religion and state power" (2004, p. 1). Concerns over the links between Islam and honour killings is now beginning to be explored (Welchman and Hossain, 2006) and some scholars and activists are interested in highlighting links between the Hindu tradition and violence against women in India (e.g. 'dowry death' and *sati*, see Oldenburg, 2002 and Hawley, 1994b). More recently, there have been widespread reports from Nigeria of women in the Muslim north of the country who have under shariah law been sentenced to death by stoning for committing adultery (Kalu, 2003).

3.6 Summary

The above sections of this review have looked at a range of issues facing women and the ways in which religion impacts upon them: reproductive choice, HIV and AIDS, female circumcision, human rights and fundamentalism. The literature discusses the ways in which religion can interact with other

social and material factors to limit women's opportunities and freedoms, as well as the ways in which it can offer support mechanisms – material, psychological and spiritual. This review has not attempted to be comprehensive: it does not, for instance, look at material on health services, education, violence or employment. The final section will deal with an area in which the values and beliefs associated with (quasi) spiritual phenomena have actually influenced the way that development has been done: ecofeminism.

3.7 Gender, religion and the environment: 'spiritual ecofeminism'

A substantial literature on 'ecofeminism' has emerged both within and outside mainstream development thinking. Ecofeminism comes in many guises (see Warren, 1994) but is generally agreed that women have most to lose from the destruction of the environment because the productive and reproductive work that women do means that they are more directly dependent upon nature than men. Moreover, because of this 'special relationship' to the natural world, women are considered to have a special bond with nature and therefore to be inherent environmentalists. These views have influenced and continue to influence approaches to women and environmental resource management within mainstream development theory and practice (Leach, 2003; Green et al, 1998).

As Green et al. write, ecofeminism critiques the:

> "dominant model of development, which is perceived as a male construct which has promoted economic development in ways which have been harmful both to women and to the environment by trampling alternative, local knowledge, especially women's knowledge, associated with organic concepts of people and nature as interconnected; by disregarding the spiritual and sacred in people's attitudes to their environment and women's special role therein; and by overriding holistic and harmonious practices…[Ecofeminists] insist that the feminine principle is not quite extinct in the environmental context but still manifest in a residual, near instinctual wisdom which some women have been able to retain in the face of developmental pressures… '[Third] world women' are portrayed as the last bastion of feminine environmental wisdom and they provide the key to its retrieval" (Green et al., 1998, p. 273).

Within this passage Green et al. allude to an important theme within ecofeminist thinking, which emphasises the spiritual connection that women have with nature. This spiritual connection is alleged to be part of what is lost when environments are destroyed, yet it is this spiritual bond which is

considered to have contributed to women's natural inclination to protect nature. Moreover, it is suggested that the potential within some religio-cultural traditions (e.g. Hinduism) to consider nature as 'feminine' lends further support to the ecofeminist argument that women are inherently 'close to nature'. This brand of ecofeminism is often called 'spiritual ecofeminism' and versions of it are found within most religious traditions (e.g. Christianity and Hinduism, see Ruether, 1992 and Shiva, 1988). While not all versions of ecofeminism stress women's spiritual connection to nature to the same degree, they do all tend to essentialise women as inherent environmentalists.

This position has been critiqued by numerous commentators for presenting a restricted and partial representation of women's interaction with their environments. Moreover, it is argued that it reflects a romantic (postmaterialist) style of environmentalism that is of little relevance to the majority of women living in developing countries (Jackson, 1993, 1995; New, 1996; see Booth, 1999 for an overview of spiritual ecofeminism).[21] As Leach writes, these images of women as natural environmentalists have influenced and informed developmental policy and practice: "the woman headloading firewood across a barren landscape has become an environment and development icon. Reproduced in policy reports, NGO glossies and academic books alike, her image encapsulates powerful and appealing messages…the message was that women have a special relationship with the environment" (2003, p. 2; Dankelman and Davidson, 1988; Rodda, 1991). Leach suggests that from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, such materialist discourses about women as 'close to nature' were "bolstered by fables about women's natural, cultural or ideological closeness to nature" (2003, p. 2). As a result, donors and NGOs came to see women as natural allies in natural resource management. Jackson (1993) discusses the emergence of an emphasis upon women-centred environmental/conservation projects, which tended to accept traditional gender roles as natural and rarely involved women in decision-making processes.[22] Popular initiatives have included social forestry, agroforestry, soil and water conservation projects, fuel-efficient stoves and solar cookers. However, as Jackson (1994) points out, many of these projects tend to treat women's time and labour as flexible and inexhaustible, with the result that the interventions often just add to their other tasks. Fuel-efficient stoves, for instance, may

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[21] We could suggest that in fact ecofeminism is a very different sort of discourse to development: more symbolic than materialist, more poetry than prose. In this sense, then, critics such as Jackson are engaging in a categorical error, since arguably ecofeminism opens up a different line of questioning which challenges the worldview or even the cosmology of development itself.

[22] This came to be known as the WED (women-environment-development) discourse and is considered to be similar to the WAD approach discussed above. Women are just slotted into existing development paradigms. However, commentators argue that WED fails to challenge gender hierarchies and that we need to see the emergence of a GED (gender-environment-development) approach.

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create more work for women, as they need tending and are unsafe for small children (Jackson, 1994, p. 119). Moreover, such views tend to give rise to an assumption that women are naturally in favour of 'sustainable development', when in practice women have, in many cases, benefited from the 'green revolution' – chemical and resource intensive agriculture.

More recently, Leach has suggested that, since the mid-1990s, "images of women as natural environmental carers have receded" (2003, p. 11) and "these ecofeminist fables seem largely to have retreated back into the world of academic writings and fringe environmental groups which originally spawned them" (2003, p. 12; see also Agarwal, 1992, who argues for the development of an 'feminist environmentalism' as an alternative to ecofeminism). Although Leach considers that such myths are receding, the view of women as natural carers has permeated development thinking to such a large degree that it is still evident in policy and programmes to this day. For instance, UNEP's manual *Women and the Environment* (2004) promotes the tapping of women's and local people's productivist and participatory potentials to ensure efficient and supposedly sustainable use of resources (Mosse, 2003). While this type of development discourse does not directly invoke the religious/spiritual symbolism that underpins cultural ecofeminism, it is uncritical about the extent to which portrayals of poor women as having shared concerns about 'sustainable' resource use, to achieve which they are inherently inclined to collectively mobilise or co-operate, are myth or fact.

The widespread influence of ecofeminism despite its shaky empirical base clearly needs further explanation. I would argue that the virtual normalisation of the notion of women as natural carers is arguably a product of the spiritual ecofeminist tendency to embed blatant biological determinism within vague and de-contextualised interpretations of Eastern or pagan religio-cultural traditions (Tomalin, 2007b). It is argued by some that the critics of ecofeminism have misunderstood its purpose, which is symbolic and poetic rather than to say something concrete about women's material conditions. Such commentators are more critical of the development appropriation of ecofeminist myths than of ecofeminism itself, arguing that if development gains little from the more romantic versions of ecofeminism, it nevertheless needs a feminist environmentalism (Agarwal, 1992). Moreover, I would suggest that, although to date considerations of women, religion and the environment have been captured by ecofeminist discourse, there is nevertheless a need to pursue an assessment of the relevance of religion to women's relationship to the environment independently of the essentialising discourses of spiritual ecofeminism (Tomalin, 2007b).

4 Gaps and research issues revealed by this review

One area that has not been covered in this review, yet is clearly a gender concern, relates to sexuality. This is an uncomfortable and taboo subject in most developing contexts (as it still is in some parts of the West) and can result in open discrimination as well as psychological trauma for individuals. Helie (2004) discusses the ways in which in some Islamic contexts there are similarities between "homophobic assaults by fundamentalists and those directed against women who do not 'behave'" (2004, p. 120). Neither have I paid attention to the topic of masculinities (Ouzgane, 2006). Many of the issues facing women in developing countries can only be addressed by also considering the ways in which masculine identities impact upon gender relations and through involving men in education and discussion.

In terms of gaps in the research, one important area for consideration when thinking about women's empowerment in poor contexts is the extent to which they are involved in decision-making processes. Limits upon women's power to make decisions are frequently shaped within the family, which then inhibits the extent to which they can participate in politics more broadly, either as voters or as political representatives. The influence that religion has upon women's role in the family, thus, has a broader impact upon women's ability to alter the political process to reflect their interests. Elsewhere I have discussed research that investigates the lack of leadership roles for women in their religious traditions and the ways in which this can impact upon women's status in society and the family (Tomalin, 2007a). Religious traditions can also impact upon women's access to education and employment, as well as the types of activities in which they might engage. While there is already a literature that discusses the impact of purdah on education and employment in the context of South Asia, and which discusses purdah as having a religious basis, I have not identified many studies that reflect upon the impact that religious values and identities have upon women's education and employment more broadly (see, for instance, Doctor, 2005; Dolan, 1999, 2001, 2002; Takyi and Addai, 2002).

I have suggested in this review that the impact of religion upon issues relevant to gender and development has indeed received attention in the literature. However, in many ways these studies have tended to remain on the margins of the 'discipline', and considerations of religion are not mainstreamed within a gendered approach to development. Moreover, where attention is paid to religion, it tends to be focussed on particular areas. Increasingly, there is a proliferation of interest in issues around women, fundamentalism and human rights, for instance, but much less interest in the

ways in which religion more broadly impacts upon education, health, environmental resource management or employment. It would be useful to the development process to encourage a research agenda that focuses upon these issues (as well as the ones discussed in this review) from a development perspective and that investigates the relationships between religion, gender and development with a view to exploring their policy implications. I have also suggested that the emergence of an emphasis on empowerment within gender and development has stimulated a broader appreciation of the causes of and solutions to gender bias in poor countries. One aspect of this has been some increased interest in the religious and cultural dimensions of women's oppression. However, on the whole such studies continue to adopt a 'religion as obstacle' approach and there is little emphasis on the ways in which women may seek to transform their traditions as a source of empowerment.

To finish this review, I will briefly reflect on two of the main research issues that have emerged. The first relates to the relationship between religion and culture. One reason why this emerges so strongly in discussions about gender and religion is because it is often claimed, for instance, that a particular practice that oppresses women is not a part of a religion but is a product of the (patriarchal) culture. The most obvious example here is female circumcision. This is widely practised by Muslims in Africa but is not recommended in the Islamic texts. It is a cultural practice rather than a religious practice. A less clear-cut example is the belief (held by some Muslims) that the Qur'an recommends the stoning of women for adultery. They believe this is a 'religious practice' sanctioned in the texts. Others, however, argue that the texts do not condone this practice and that the stoning of women for adultery is the product of a cultural layer imposed upon the religion. The difficulty here is that opponents of a particular practice or custom can argue that it is cultural rather than religious, if they can find support for their position within the texts. The fact that religious texts are open to different, and often opposing, interpretations means that the 'culture not religion' argument is possible to sustain on a range of issues. It relies upon the notion of a pure and original religion that periodically becomes corrupted by cultural influences. This is incompatible with a social science perspective that is interested in the ways that particular views and attitudes are socially constructed. From this perspective, what we have is a series of socially constructed positions that maintain their legitimacy through the argument that 'actual' religion is as it was intended to be. Whether this presents methodological problems is worth considering. I would argue that this research programme is not concerned to scrutinise the validity of

particular positions from a theological perspective: it is not the role of social science to engage in this sort of enterprise. However, we are concerned to investigate and highlight the ways in which different religious positions may be compatible with a development agenda that is concerned with poverty reduction and the pursuit of human rights. While an outsider or non-believer might consider that religion is a social construction, the fact that insiders or believers make a distinction between religion and culture is relevant to our research.

The second research issue that I feel is raised by this consideration of religion, gender and development is how we understand and actually study the relationship between values/beliefs and practices/actions. One problem that faces us here is the extent to which actions actually reflect values. How can we be sure that particular patterns of behaviour have been influenced by religious beliefs? How do we actually research this? Narayan (1997), for instance, referring particularly to dowry death and *sati,* has heavily criticised the ways in which western scholars have tended to assume that certain 'cultural' practices that effect women in India are a result of religious beliefs and values. Instead, she argues that the role of patriarchy is much more significant in determining such acts of violence against women (see also Rudd, 2001). Similarly, with respect to discussions on religion and the environment, it is often assumed that, because environmental values can be read from religious texts, this tells us something about how people have acted towards their environments. This may be regarded as errant on two counts. Firstly, it is arguably anachronistic (since environmentalism is a contemporary issue). Secondly, it assumes that actions can be read off from values. I would argue that this second research issue poses greater methodological problems than the first, since it is important to avoid essentialisms that could end up influencing policy.

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African Women's bibliographic database: **http://www.africabib.org/women.html** - excellent resource, up to date references which can be searched by country and issue (section on religion and witchcraft) accessed 2/2/07.

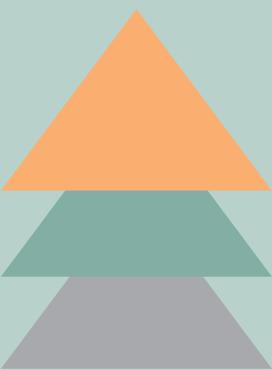1995 *Gender and Development* 3(1): the whole edition is dedicated to culture, gender and development.

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