

Introduction

The in-between is often considered as a bare and infertile space. To venture into the borderland between two states, for example, can be fatal; it is a lawless area, threatening and chaotic, hostile to human well-being and flourishing. Yet borders also provide spaces for negotiation, interconnection and transgression and for articulations of identities and differences. Like bridges, borders emphasize difference and distance, but also connection. However borders differ from bridges, insofar as bridges connect two clearly circumscribed, individual and independent places, while borders and border areas are more messy and complex: borders can be reinscribed, they can shift over time, they can be challenged or even fought about. Recent reflections inspired by post-colonialist and queer theory have raised the awareness that the in-between is not necessarily sterile, but precisely because of its uncircumscribed, fluid nature, being non-identified and undefined, it can be the space where new ideas develop, new insights open up and new forms of relationship to the world and to other human beings take shape.

Theology and religious studies have always moved in an in-between space: because of their subject, the study of the human relationship with the transcendent, and because of their relationship both to academic research and to personal faith. In particular feminist and gender-conscious approaches in these fields find themselves very often in a borderland of identities, disciplines, interests and affiliations.

The interest and aim of this volume is to explore the in-between space in its positive and negative, challenging and limiting aspects. Such probing of the positive and problematic in-between in theological and religious studies opens up different questions: in what way do theories of the in-between function as a category of theological and religious reflections from the perspective of sexuality and gender? How are theology and religious studies positioned in an academic or institutional borderland, and what could be the positive and negative consequence of this situation? In what way do theology and religious studies function as a borderland between academic research from a gender perspective, personal experience and political engagement? Is it possible to use the metaphor of the in-between to investigate how theology and religious studies are challenged in terms of geography, politics, academia and religious

affiliation? In what way does being in-between religions or denominations open up spaces for the sharing and exchange of traditions? How does the in-between function with regard to identities and differences? Can disciplinary methodologies, such as the ones of religious studies and theology be seen as a borderland, and if so what are the challenges and prospects of such an inter-disciplinarity of the borderlands? In what ways do biblical texts serve as in-between spaces in relation to bodies and cultures? What does the experience of being in-between political and socio-political systems have to do with feminist/gender-aware theology and religious studies?

These and many more questions come to mind when thinking about the in-between as a space for gender-conscious theology and religious studies. Not all of them can, of course, be answered in the space of a brief volume. The discussion of these compelling questions opens with a short philosophical reflection on the in-between by *Anne-Claire Mulder*, *Sigríður Guðmarsdóttir* and *Erla Karlsdóttir*. Each of the reflections muses about a different aspect of the concept. Mulder writes about the ethical task of generating the passion of wonder for each other, Guðmarsdóttir explores Luce Irigaray's thought on the mystical abyss and its ontological connection to sexual difference, and Karlsdóttir argues for a fruitful environmental negotiation in the in-between space of material feminism and Irigarayan embodiment.

The "Theme" part of the volume comprises five articles that all address the in-between from different standpoints. In the first contribution, "The Queer Body of the Risen One," *Letitia Tomassone* searches for in-between spaces in Muslim and Christian theologies and evaluates the possibilities these sacred spaces can offer for LGBT spirituality. For Tomassone, the way in which culture and religion privilege heterosexuality is hurtful and forces people into concealment and lies. Given the ambiguous state of such borders, Tomassone argues that the boundaries of sexual conduct also offer interesting ways of transgression and mixture which can be helpful for negotiating queer religious spaces. If Tomassone has led us into a discussion about the boundaries of religion and sexualities, *Roberta Franchi* offers us a guided tour into the geographical in-between travelled in Christian pilgrimage, in "In-between Spaces: Women, Travelling and the Christian Tradition." Franchi argues that the practice of pilgrimage has provided women with rare opportunities to create and experience some gender trouble. According to Franchi texts about pilgrimages often present the female pilgrim as *mulier virilis*, a woman who has overcome the physical imperfection of her female nature. This interesting blurring of genders brings out the dynamic relation between spatial and spiritual in-betweens,

and points to a category of the in-between which is not stable, but constantly in motion. *Sigríður Guðmarsdóttir* searches for the in-between in “Trinh Minh-ha and In-between Religious Language: Painted in Gray and Red Colors.” Guðmarsdóttir examines legends of light and darkness as male and female in East and West through the postcolonial lense of Vietnamese filmmaker Trinh T. Min-ha. For Guðmarsdóttir, new religious images and thinking have the capacity to emerge from the in-between. From Guðmarsdóttir’s in-between religious and postcolonial imagery of luminosity we move to *Sylvia Martínez Cano*’s article “Desde los márgenes: mujeres que viven en la frontera.” For Cano, women live on the margins of society in so many ways, and have to make an extra effort not to be erased from that border. For Cano, this life at the boundary has both positive and negative aspects, and she likens it to the joy and pain of giving birth. *Rita Perintfalvi* provides us with a transgression of boundaries in spiritual experiences, especially in eroticism in her article “Erotik und Mystik als Grenzüberschreitung: Das Hohelied 5,2-8 und die mystischen Texte von Mechthild von Magdeburg.” Perintfalvi brings together two different texts, the Song of Songs and the medieval writings of Mechthild in order to explore the theme of transgressiveness in female sexuality and spirituality that enable women the freedom to define themselves precisely through their creative exploration of the in-between.

The “Forum” section offers us insights into the struggles, successes and activities of women in theological research, both in Europe and in other continents. In many, although more indirect ways, these papers also represent explorations of the in-between in various senses: academic, ecclesial, linguistic. The first article in this section is a report from a conference in The Netherlands in 2011, where the impact of gender studies on theological and religious studies was examined. *Anne-Claire Mulder*, *Angela Berlis* and *Mathilde van Dijk* report in “Gender in Theology and Religion: A Success Story?! Report from a Conference” about the successes and draw-backs of gender studies in theology and future challenges. According to the authors, the participants in the conference came to the conclusion that even though the mainstreaming of gender in theological disciplines has in many ways been successful, a lack of interest in gender studies by male scholars, and a lack of the recognition of research in the in-between space of gender and religion in the scientific community might be taken to be strong warning signs. After having heard of interdisciplinary spaces between gender and religion (and lack thereof), *Marta Zubía Guinea* discusses another ambiguous interstitial space, that between feminist theology and ecclesial institutions. In “¿Errores doctrinales o plura-

lismo teológico?” Zubía Guinea writes about the Vatican’s controversial investigation of the feminist theologians Margaret Farley and Elizabeth Johnson, as well as the LCWR, Leadership Conference of Women Religious over doctrinal issues. *Sabine Dievenkorn’s* article, “The Bible in Culturally Balanced and Inclusive Spanish: An Approach to Promote a Project from Chile,” opens up another yet another context of women’s work for gender justice. Dievenkorn reports about an alternative and inclusive Bible translation that is being worked on in Chile by female theologians. This Bible translation searches for a way to interpret sacred scriptures in a way that is committed to gender, social and religious justice in a context that has historically been conditioned by colonialization and mission where most earlier religious traditions have been erased.

In the section “Women Traditions in Europe,” *Larissa Hrotko’s* article “Zwischen Kulturen und Generationen: Rollen und Positionen der Geschlechter in der traditionellen Synagoge der postsäkularen Gesellschaft Ungarns” examines women’s positions in “neologue” synagogues. In the post-secular societies of Hungary, these religious communities are under pressure to return to more traditional values, which has a major impact on the female members in these communities and their everyday life. Hrotko’s paper evaluates the situation of the neologue synagogue in Budapest and women’s role and opportunities for religious agency in this.

It is fitting that this volume on the in-between frames its collection of articles with queer methodologies. *Karin Hügel* offers us a reading of the Song of Songs in the section “Work in Progress.” Hügel’s article, “Queere Lesarten des Hohelieds”, part of her doctoral thesis, portrays the Song of Songs as a text undoing norms and conventions of sexual desire, gender identity and racial stereotypes. Through her queer reading of the Song of Songs, Hügel presents this text as an antidote, “a queer counter-text” to some of the misogynistic biblical texts and interpretations that have shaped women’s identity as the inferior gender.

This volume on the in-between leads us across geographical, linguistic and cultural boundaries, through the postcolonial critique of borders and symbols, to the marginalization of women and investigations of feminist theologies. During this textual journey through borderlands we come across negotiations of gender identities, interdisciplinary borderlands, transgressions of the erotic and queer, philosophical musings on the in-between and the inclusive, contextual Bible translations, love and desire in the interstices of what is considered “normal” and acceptable. And as it turns out, the in-between, the borderland of theological and religious studies is more fertile and complex than one would think at first glance.