

*Anne-Marie Korte*

## **Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* as a Case of/for Feminist Public Theology**

### **Introduction**

In this contribution I aim to discuss the goals and contours of a contemporary, Europe-based feminist public theology. In the first part of this contribution, I will explicate my interest in this position in conversation with earlier and recently emerging debates on public theology. Then, in the second part, I will relate my interest for a contextual feminist public theology to some significant biographical aspects of my life as a feminist theologian and a researcher in the field of religion and gender. As will become clear, to me this means more – and is also more complicated – than giving an account of my own context, position, interests, and limitations as a researcher, which is generally regarded as an indispensable part of feminist methodology. The question of why, but also of where and when to engage with feminist public theology is also at stake here.<sup>1</sup> In the third part of this text I will present an analysis of Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* and the reactions and comments that it has elicited. In February 2012, this Russian feminist formation did a “political art performance” in Moscow's central Russian Orthodox Christ the Saviour Church, which was followed by extremely critical and unprecedented repressive reactions by the leading figures of the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church. Through this case study I attempt to make my theoretical and personal reflections on feminist public theology more concrete, suggesting how and to which

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<sup>1</sup> See the feminist epistemologist positions of Donna Haraway and Karen Barad who argue that (feminist) researchers are not only situated in, but also part of the reality that they investigate, and should therefore reflect their moral responsibilities for the networks, processes, and relations in which they are involved as researchers. Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” in: Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge: New York 1991), 183-201; Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press: Durham 2007), esp. 393.

ends Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* could be interpreted as a case of and for feminist public theology.

### **Feminist Public Theology in Discussion**

In 1981 American theologian David Tracy introduced his famous threefold typology of the main "publics" to which theological reflection should be directed: the academy, the church, and the (larger) society as different (though interrelated) publics. Tracy stated that every theologian "must face squarely the claims to meaning and truth of all three publics" and address each accordingly. For all theological reflection, whether it be fundamental, systematic or practical (to use Tracy's categories), is "determined by a relentless drive to genuine publicness to and for all three publics."<sup>2</sup> Tracy's call for "publicness" conveyed, in a passionate but also rather general way, the task for theologians to be more engaged and to speak in a relevant manner in and for the public domains and circuits of modern secularizing societies, in which theological reflection has increasingly lost its status and self-evidence.

According to Tracy's typology, "public theology" – in its current manifestations – is sometimes cast as a separate branch of theology, namely as a form of theological reflection that primarily responds to societal developments and questions (as distinguished from internal ecclesial or academic ones).<sup>3</sup> But according to Scottish theologian Duncan Forrester, public theology is characterized by more complex dynamics. He affirms that public theology often takes "the world's agenda", or parts of it, as its own agenda, but states that it does so in order to deploy and develop theology in and for the public debate. "[It] seeks to offer distinctive and constructive insights from the treasury of faith to help in the building of a decent society, the restraint of evil, the curbing of violence, nation-building, and reconciliation in the public arena."<sup>4</sup> Forrester

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<sup>2</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (SCM Press: London 1981), 29.

<sup>3</sup> See Max L. Stackhouse, "Public Theology and Political Economy in a Globalizing Era," in: William Storrar / Andrew Morton (eds.), *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester* (T&T Clark: London 2004), 179-194; Max L. Stackhouse, "Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology: What's the Difference?," in: Len D. Hansen (ed.), *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies, and Issues in Public Theology* (African Sun Media: Stellenbosch 2007), 78-95; Ernst M. Conradie (ed.), *Collected Essays in Public Theology – Dirk Smit* (Sun Press: Stellenbosch 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Duncan B. Forrester, "The Scope of Public Theology," in: *Studies in Christian Ethics* 17.2 (2004), 6.

also notes an increasing interest among theologians and scholars of religion in public theology, related to the post-9/11 awareness of the changing public role of religion in contemporary societies, in particular in those societies that are perceived as secularized or secularizing.

Generally speaking, contemporary public theology seeks to reflect on practices of faith and on faith-related questions in their specific relation to the public domain and people's social, political, and communal lives. Public theology aims at contributing to this communal life, in particular to the furthering of social justice and human dignity that this communal life both depends on and gives rise to. Public theology does so by performing critical interventions, both theoretical and practical.<sup>5</sup> It acknowledges as foundational the need for theology to interact with public issues of contemporary society, issues, I would like to emphasize, that also encompass questions and concerns with strong personal and private dimensions.

Philosopher Jürgen Habermas's reflections on the political, social, and cultural role of the public domain in modern societies are foundational for numerous examples of public theology.<sup>6</sup> His 2008 manifesto "Notes on Post-secular Society", in which he revised his view on the public role of religion, stimulated these debates in important ways.<sup>7</sup> He argues that the role of religion in the contemporary public domain is characterized by the new visibility and

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<sup>5</sup> See William F. Storrar / Andrew R. Morton (eds.), *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester* (T & T Clark: London 2004); Gavin D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy and Nation* (Blackwell: Oxford 2005); Hent de Vries / Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World* (Fordham University Press: New York 2006); Graham Ward / Michel Hoelzl (eds.), *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics* (Continuum: London 2008); Michael S. Hogue, "After the Secular: Toward a Pragmatic Public Theology," in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78.2 (2010), 346-374; Christopher Baker / Justin Beaumont (eds.), *Postsecular Cities: Space, Theory and Practice* (Continuum: London 2010); Aloys Wijngaards, *Worldly Theology: On Connecting Public Theology and Economics* (PhD thesis, Radboud University Nijmegen 2012); and the *International Journal for Public Theology* published by Brill, Leiden.

<sup>6</sup> Besides Habermas, in particular Jürgen Moltmann, José Casanova, and Charles Taylor have contributed to the current rise of interest for these topics in the field of theology and the study of religion. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1994); Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (SCM Press: London 1999); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge 2007).

<sup>7</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," in: *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25.4 (2008), 17-29.

transformed presence of religions. The term “post-secular” does not denote an actual change of status or condition of European countries, but the awareness of change and transition. “Today, public consciousness in Europe can be described in terms of a ‘post-secular society’ to the extent that at present it still has to adjust itself to the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment.”<sup>8</sup>

Habermas takes a critical position towards modern self-evidently secularist understandings of the public sphere as the place and forum of the formation of public opinion. He pleads to recognize and value the contribution of religious utterances and stances within this political public sphere. He argues that “[p]articularly with regard to vulnerable social relations, religious traditions possess the power to convincingly articulate moral sensitivities and solidaristic intuitions”.<sup>9</sup> Habermas’s observations have been met with critical responses, but his insistence that religious worldviews and the moral teachings of religions should be welcomed, rather than feared and excluded, with their contributions to the public debate has definitely inspired the interest in and further development of public theological views.

Public theology in its current forms has its roots in the political, liberation, and contextual theologies of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> I will analyze this interrelationship in more detail below. There are two other characteristics of public theology that I find important to mention here, because they have directly stimulated my own current interest in public theology. First, public theology is based predominantly – but certainly not only – in Europe and connected to the long history, current developments and ongoing fierce debates about the role of religion in the public domain in many European societies.<sup>11</sup> Second, up until now, feminist theologians and scholars of gender and religion have not very actively taken part in the articulation of and debates on public theology. There are, however, a few notable exceptions, whose contributions I will discuss here.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Habermas, “Notes on Post-secular Society,” 19.

<sup>9</sup> Habermas, “Notes on Post-secular Society,” 29.

<sup>10</sup> See also Stackhouse, “Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology”.

<sup>11</sup> A lively interest in public theology is also noticeable in South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, and in circles of Lutheran and Calvinist theologians (see note 4).

<sup>12</sup> See Marcella María Althaus-Reid, “In the Centre There Are No Fragments: *Teologías Desencajadas* (Reflections on Unfitting Theologies),” in: William F. Storrar / Andrew R. Morton (eds.), *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester* (T&T Clark: London 2004), 365-384; Mary C. Grey, “Living Without Dreams: Is There a Spirituality

As the point of departure for this exploration I have taken a recent publication by Rosemary Radford Ruether, one of the founding mothers of Christian feminist theology, who has contributed substantially to this field for more than forty years now and who can be called one of its most eminent, constant and well-known public voices. In 2010 the fairly new, Europe-based *International Journal of Public Theology*<sup>13</sup> published a special issue on feminist theology, in which Ruether wrote the opening article under the heading “Feminist Theology: Where Is It Going?”. Without defining public theology as such, Ruether claims here that “[f]eminist theology is one of the major forms of public theology that has developed over the last forty years”.<sup>14</sup>

Interesting for my argument here is Ruether’s portrayal of feminist theology as public theology. Using a genealogical approach she sketches forty years of feminist theology as “a trajectory of development in terms of continual expansion and diversification, across race and ethnic groups, across nations and continents and across faiths”.<sup>15</sup> Beginning with the feminist critique and revision of Christian and Jewish theology at seminaries and universities in the U.S.A. in the 1960s and 1970s, Ruether discerns five stages in this trajectory of development:

- *Feminist Theological Awakenings*: the impact of the civil rights and feminist movements at the seminaries and universities in the U.S.A. in the 1960s and 1970s;
- *Ethnic and Sexual Diversity*: the critique of feminists of color, LGBT scholars and new generations in the feminist movement and at the seminaries and universities in the U.S.A. in the 1980s and 1990s;

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for Justice in a Globalized World?,” in: William F. Storrar / Andrew R. Morton, *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester* (T&T Clark: London 2004), 231-249; Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Feminist Theology: Where Is It Going?,” in: *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010), 5-20; Heather Walton, “You Have to Say You Cannot Speak: Feminist Reflections Upon Public Theology,” in: *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010), 21-36.

<sup>13</sup> Edited by Sebastian Kim (York St John University, UK). Its mission statement reads: “Public theology is the result of the growing need for theology to interact with public issues of contemporary society. It seeks to engage in dialogue with different academic disciplines such as politics, economics, cultural studies, religious studies, as well as with spirituality, globalization and society in general. The *International Journal of Public Theology*, affiliated with the Global Network for Public Theology, is a platform for original interdisciplinary research in the field of public theology.” (<http://www.brill.com/international-journal-public-theology>, 27 May 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Ruether, “Feminist Theology: Where Is It Going?,” 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ruether, “Feminist Theology: Where Is It Going?,” 6.

- *International Reach*: the critical contributions of Two Thirds World feminisms and non-western Christianities from the 1990s onwards;
- *Interfaith Expansion*: the rise of cooperation and exchange among feminists across religions;
- *Transnational Feminism*: the rise of international feminist politics in United Nations settings, human rights movements and eco-justice movements as the common ground for feminist-theological cooperation across nations, cultures, and religions.

For each stage, Ruether identifies the social movements that initiated action and reform. She mentions the actual locations and institutions involved, the leading authors, and the results of their activities. In particular, Ruether names the networks and organisations that have been the result of these stages. Consistent with her own life-long, outspoken political interests and her activist stances in feminist movements within and across religions, Ruether highlights the role of movements for social justice and of faith-based organisations that engage with these movements, seeing them as the instances that have given decisive new impulses to feminist theology. She thus equates this particular social embedding with the public position and relevance of feminist theology.

I do think that Ruether rightly sees the listed social movements and organisations as the social texture and constitutive for the political dynamics of classic feminist theology. However, I also think that she fails to reflect upon some critical aspects and crucial questions that feminist public theology faces today.<sup>16</sup> It is important to acknowledge how deeply Ruether's understanding of feminist theology as public theology is informed by the goals and suppositions of twentieth-century political theology as developed in the 1960s by German theologians Johann Baptist Metz and Dorothee Sölle.<sup>17</sup> These theologians aimed to withstand both the modern tendency towards the privatization of faith and the traditional hegemonic politicization of religion, and they strove to make theological reflection contribute to a critical-political discourse in the

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<sup>16</sup> Ruether's genealogical sketch of feminist theology also has a remarkable blind spot because it does not consider the European situation, developments, and influences as one of its locations and sources. Pioneering feminist theologians from the first generation came from Europe or studied in Europe (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary Daly) and in western Europe since the mid-1970s, authors such as Elisabeth Moltmann, Catharina Halkes, and Elisabeth Gössmann have published very influential texts in this field.

<sup>17</sup> See Johann Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World* (Herder & Herder: London 1968); Dorothee Sölle, *Political Theology* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1974).

public realm, on the basis of the social implications of the Christian message. More recently German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, one of the most influential spokespersons of this political theology, has summarized its aims and suppositions by arguing that Christian theology has at its core a concern for the coming of God's kingdom in human history:

Its subject alone makes Christian theology a *theologia publica*, a public theology. It gets involved in the public affairs of society. It thinks about what is of general concern in the light of hope in Christ for the Kingdom of God. It becomes political in the name of the poor and the marginalized in a given society. Remembrance of the crucified Christ makes it critical towards political religions and idolatries. It thinks critically about the religious and moral values of the societies in which it exists, and presents its reflections as a reasoned position.<sup>18</sup>

This generation of Christian political theologians has been able to connect the Enlightenment social and political ideals of freedom, autonomy, and equality to the origins of the biblical and Christian traditions, and to present Christianity's core message as an emancipatory model of faith that could be reasonably expressed and discussed. They were fully convinced that this political theology could play a substantial and critical role in the socio-political realm, because of its dual mission of offering hope and expressing critique founded in the eschatological vision of the coming of God's kingdom. However, no critical account was given of the rationalized concept of religious faith that this emancipatory model rests upon, a model which moreover hardly acknowledges the material, ritual, communal, and institutional aspects of religions as parts of the public domain. Faith here comes close to one's innermost personal convictions as an independent citizen, a rather confined, Protestant and modern western view, as postcolonial anthropologists such as Talal Assad, Saba Mahmood, and Nilüfer Göle have argued.<sup>19</sup> When Dorothee Sölle, in the later part of her

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<sup>18</sup> Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> See Talal Assad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press: Stanford 2003); Mahmood, Saba, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?," in: Talal Assad / Wendy Brown / Judith Butler / Saba Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech* (Townsend Center for the Humanities: Berkeley 2009), 64-100; Nilüfer Göle / Ludwig Ammann, *Islam in Public: Turkey, Iran and Europe* (Istanbul Bilgi University Press: Istanbul 2006); Nilüfer Göle, "The Civilizational, Spatial, and Sexual Powers of the Secular," in: Michael Warner / Jonathan Vanantwerpen / Craig Calhoun (eds.), *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge 2010), 243-264.

life, turned to an exploration of the spiritual sources of this emancipatory model of faith – and, therefore, turned to study the mystical schools and practices of the great world religions – many politically engaged Christians thought she had lost her interest in political theology.<sup>20</sup>

This modern emancipatory model of faith that bolsters political theology also pervades Ruether's overview of feminist theology as public theology that I presented earlier. Typical of all feminist theology, Ruether states, is its dual mission that can be shared and sustained by feminists across nations, ethnic differences, and religions in an "interfaith dialogue":

On the one hand, it would seek to see how each of the world's religious traditions is contributing to the problem with its traditional teachings of the subordination of women, of ethnic minorities and of nature. On the other hand, it would seek to lift up the positive traditions of each religious tradition that can contribute to justice between men and women, between ethnic groups and towards a sustainable relationship between humans and the rest of nature. It would seek to diffuse hostility and violence based on religious exclusivism and negation of other religions and to create an environment for ecumenical cooperation toward a peaceful, just and sustainable world.<sup>21</sup>

Both Heather Walton and Marcella Althaus-Reid have taken a sceptical position towards a public theology that like Ruether's so clearly speaks of liberatory hope and that is based on an emancipatory model of faith that could be shared across national, ethnic, and religious differences. Walton, a practical theologian at the University of Glasgow, states that it is feminist theology itself that has provided her with both reservation and antidotes towards these ambitions. Her engagement with feminist theology during her daily struggles with the ambiguity of faith, the shortcomings of religious communities, and the complexities of critical gender analyses,<sup>22</sup> has taught her, first, to "cherish particularity, location and diversity in theological reflection rather than the

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<sup>20</sup> See Dorothee Sölle, *Mystik und Widerstand: 'Du stilles Geschrei'* (Hoffmann und Campe: Hamburg 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Ruether, "Feminist Theology: Where Is It Going?," 19.

<sup>22</sup> "The ambiguities of gender and power are clearest within the heterogeneous terrain of religious practice. Churches, mosques, shrines and cult gatherings are sites in which normative ideals are ever more deeply embedded, and arenas from which women can appropriate moral, emotional and material resources to pursue their own projects" (Andrea Cornwall, *Readings in Gender in Africa* [James Currey: Oxford 2005], 11).

construction of new grand narratives.”<sup>23</sup> Secondly, Walton expresses the need for feminist public theology to include much more than rational discourse if it is to approach the unbearable mystery of human suffering of which religious faith tries to speak. And a third reservation that Walton has concerns the observation that public theologians often employ the gendered conventions by which the public sphere is differentiated from the feminized “private” environment of both local churches and the domestic sphere. As feminist critique has demonstrated, Habermas’s conception of the public sphere risks privileging certain understandings of rational communication over others, and reifying the distinctions between private and public, reinscribing the gendered binaries on which this distinction rests. Walton points to the necessity to deconstruct gendered public/private distinctions as a requirement for feminist public theology to engage with the most pressing social needs of women in everyday life.<sup>24</sup>

Marcella Althaus-Reid, originating from Argentina and working for the Queer Theology Project at the University of Edinburgh until her untimely death in 2009, speaks from a feminist postcolonial perspective, and has questioned even more radically the ambitions of public theology as represented by Jürgen Moltmann, Duncan Forrester, and Max Stackhouse. She states that instead of globalizing theological discourse and speaking in generalizing and moralizing terms of and to the “most excluded”, public theologians should engage with the subversive voices, unfitting theological fragments and indecent longings that already “are speaking back to the Empire”, to use Gayatri Spivak’s well-known postcolonial metaphor.<sup>25</sup> Althaus-Reid wants us to turn to the “real praxis of living theology” and to the “theology in action” that comes to us in these voices, fragments and longings “from below”, as she has tried to do exemplarily in her *Indecent Theology* project.<sup>26</sup>

For Althaus-Reid, the objectives of revolt against the crushing neoliberal market system should be constitutive parts of any radical public theology, and they include a self-critical stance of theologians regarding their own position and praxis.<sup>27</sup> In her witty and provocative style she offers a glimpse of what this could mean:

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<sup>23</sup> Walton, “You Have to Say You Cannot Speak,” 26-27.

<sup>24</sup> See Walton, “You Have to Say You Cannot Speak,” 31.

<sup>25</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Macmillan: Basingstoke 1988).

<sup>26</sup> See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (Routledge: London 2000).

<sup>27</sup> See Althaus-Reid, “In the Centre There Are No Fragments,” 377.

We are doing political theology in times of desperation. Baring our bums in public has become a gesture of thinking people and perhaps of thinking theologians too. We need a political theology much more disruptive in thinking but also in writing. Or in not writing, but joining rebellious people. A political theology the aim of which is to destabilize the status quo, and to destabilize itself.<sup>28</sup>

Despite their differences these various stances in and towards public theology all demonstrate a deep concern to keep feminist theologians unconditionally focused on today's most pressing social questions and needs. In my view it is important to reconsider these profound ambitions in the light of post-secular awareness and critical thought, because these perspectives can help to acknowledge and address the significant institutional changes and intellectual challenges in which theology and religious studies are involved in contemporary Europe.<sup>29</sup>

### **Shifts and Challenges to Address**

Currently there are three important shifts that I see as refractions of the post-secular situation that affect feminist theology and should be confronted:

- (1) the rise of international and interfaith feminisms (and their impact on the academic study of religion and gender);<sup>30</sup>
- (2) the significant changes of the position and intellectual agenda of theology and religious studies in western universities, which in Europe are strongly interconnected with both secularizing and reconfessionalizing tendencies;<sup>31</sup>
- (3) the increased presence of religion(s) in the public domain as “medium” or “arena” of political and cultural conflicts.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Althaus-Reid, “In the Centre There Are No Fragments,” 375.

<sup>29</sup> See José Casanova, *Religion, Politics and Gender Equality: Public Religions Revisited* (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development [UNRISD], Draft, April 2009); Rosi Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” in: *Theory, Culture and Society* 25.6 (2008), 1-24; Sarah Bracke, “Conjugating the Modern/Religious, Conceptualizing Female Religious Agency: Contours of a ‘Post-secular’ Conjuncture,” in: *Theory, Culture and Society* 25.6 (2008), 51-67.

<sup>30</sup> See Dawn T. M. Llewellyn, “Secular and Religious Feminisms: A Future of Disconnection?,” in: *Feminist Theology* 21.3 (2013), 244-258.

<sup>31</sup> See Maaike de Haardt, “Expanding the Concepts and the Field: Feminist Liberation Theology and Beyond,” in: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27.1 (2011), 114-118.

<sup>32</sup> See Anne-Marie Korte, “Openings: A Genealogical Introduction to Religion and Gender,” in: *Religion and Gender* 1.1 (2011), 1-17.

In my own history as a teacher in feminist theology and a researcher in the field of religion and gender I have been involved in these shifts in a very profound way, which has caused me to reflect upon both their practical and theoretical implications. In 2006, I was suddenly confronted with the end of my appointment as Associate Professor of Theological Women's Studies at a Roman Catholic Theological Faculty in the Netherlands, where I had been teaching for two decades. My subject, theological women's studies, had been removed from the academic theological curriculum and my authorization to teach at a Roman Catholic Theological Faculty where priests are trained was withdrawn. I was transferred several times to various teaching and research positions outside the Roman Catholic theological education programmes, until after three years I obtained a chair for Religion and Gender at the Faculty of Humanities of a large state university in the Netherlands, a chair that is now incorporated in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies.

From the moment that I started working outside a primarily theological academic setting, I realized that I had to rearrange my theoretical frameworks and scholarly networks in substantial ways. In this constellation I started a series of new projects, founded an international and interdisciplinary journal, obtained the funding for an international cooperation project, designed new courses and gathered new research groups, all under the heading of "Religion and Gender", now conceived as an interdisciplinary field of studies within the humanities, in which students and scholars from a great variety of disciplines participate. I came to see feminist theology as one of the contributors to this field of studies, alongside the increasing number of scholars in gender studies who study religion from the perspective of many disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences.

This change in my position compelled me to rethink my relation to what I call "classic" feminist theology and to confront my smouldering worries about its position and relevance in contemporary society. For quite some time my greatest concern has been that classic feminist theology and its most direct successors, as mapped by Rosemary Radford Ruether, hardly engage with the many questions posed by the transformations of religion and the new visibility and controversiality of religions, nor with the problematization of the western secularization paradigm and the western conception of religious faith, nor with the rise of a post-secular critical awareness, at least as an epistemological stance.

For instance, for me the most critical public issue to address is why gendered corporeality and normative sexuality figure so prominently in many

contemporary public conflicts over religion in modern and modernizing societies.<sup>33</sup> Recent developments, summarized as the de-privatization of religion and the (re-)turn to religion as a political mobilizer in modern societies, show that this fascination for dis/closed female corporeality is more than a remnant of an almost overcome androcentric worldview. Close attention to the correct appearance, positioning, and use of women's bodies forms a substantive way to perform collective and individual religious identity in and towards modern western society. Moreover, this modeling of female – and in some cases also male – corporeality establishes and represents religious change and renewal in a modern, globalized, and multi-religious culture. And finally, these developments show that women are not only to be thought of as objects of these processes of religious profiling, but also as agents and initiators, who create public religious presence by modelling their bodies. This is a vast, complex array of questions that are of utmost relevance for gender studies in theology and religion, for which the more classic feminist theological approaches, in my opinion, do not offer analytical tools or insights.

I directed my research to projects that center on the questions outlined above. The summer of 2006 became memorable: pop star Madonna caused great agitation by performing a crucifixion scene in her *Confessions on a Dance Floor* show, and I realized that the worldwide commotion and controversies that this performance evoked, revealed the seismographic status of female corporeality and normative sexuality at the shifting fracture lines of religion versus secularity. I started studying this case, discovered more cases and came to focus my research on contemporary feminist art and performance projects accused of blasphemy.<sup>34</sup> I will now turn to one of these cases and discuss Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* as a case of/for Feminist Public Theology.

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<sup>33</sup> See for an example from India: Veena Das, "The Figure of the Abducted Woman: The Citizen as Sexed," in: Hent de Vries / Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World* (Fordham University Press: New York 2006), 427-443.

<sup>34</sup> Anne-Marie Korte, "Madonna's Crucifixion and the Female Body in Feminist Theology," in: Rosemarie Buikema / Iris van der Tuin (eds.), *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture* (Routledge: New York 2009), 117-133; Anne-Marie Korte, "Madonna's kruisigingscène: Blasfemie of theologische uitdaging?," in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 49 (2009), 125-140; Anne-Marie Korte, "Blasphemous Feminist Art: Incarnate Politics of Identity in Post-secular Society" (forthcoming).

## **Pussy Riot's Punk Prayer as a Case of/for Feminist Public Theology**

**Virgin Mary, Put Putin Away**  
(Punk Prayer)

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away,  
Put Putin away, put Putin away!  
(End chorus)

Black robe, golden epaulettes  
All parishioners crawl to bow  
The phantom of liberty is in heaven  
Gay pride sent to Siberia in chains

The head of the KGB, their chief saint,  
Leads protesters to prison under escort  
In order not to offend His Holiness  
Women must give birth and love

Shit, shit, the Lord's shit!  
Shit, shit, the Lord's shit

(Chorus)

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, become a feminist  
Become a feminist, become a feminist!  
(End chorus)

The church's praise of rotten dictators  
The cross-bearer procession of black limousines  
A teacher-preacher will meet you at school  
Go to class – bring him money!

Patriarch Gundayaev believes in Putin  
Bitch, better believe in God instead!  
The belt of the Virgin can't replace mass meetings  
Mary, Mother of God, is with us in protest!

(Chorus)

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away,  
Put Putin away, put Putin away!  
(End chorus)<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Authorized lyrics in: Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom: Letters from Prison, Songs, Poems, and Courtroom Statements, Plus Tributes to the Punk Band That Shook the World* (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York: New York 2013), 13-14.

On February 21, 2012, five female members of the Russian feminist punk formation Pussy Riot (an art collective consisting of about a dozen young Russian men and women based in Moscow) performed an unexpected, but well-prepared “political gesture” in the center of Moscow. They introduced a novel element to the series of political protests in urban guerrilla style that they had been practicing in the previous two years in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011.<sup>36</sup> This time they addressed the renewed and tightening relationship between church and state in contemporary Russia, performing a (self-designated) *Punk Prayer* in the Russian Orthodox Christ the Saviour Church near the Kremlin. At the beginning of carnival, a week before Eastern Christianity’s Great Lent, they walked into the cathedral. Four of the female members took off their winter gear and pulled brightly colored balaclavas over their heads. Dressed in short dresses, leggings and boots, they advanced toward the iconostasis and started jumping around, punching and kicking the air, singing and shouting, kneeling and crossing themselves, while being videotaped from several angles by other group members. Within less than a minute they were apprehended by security guards and removed from the sanctuary.

On the very day of the curtailed performance the group released a video clip on the internet in which both the act and its termination were shown. This clip also included the full version of the anti-Putin *Punk Prayer*, which is partly performed in the style of a solemn hymn to the Virgin Mary, and partly in the form of a shouted punk rap. The song, called “Mother of God, Put Putin Away”, condemns the Russian Orthodox Church’s ties to the Putin regime, calls its teaching that women must “know your place in the birthing ward” “holy shit”, states that “the most holy Mother of God is at the rallies with us”, and implores the Virgin Mary to chase Putin out of her church. The chorus sounds: “Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away, Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away.”

On the evening after Pussy Riot’s protest performance in the Christ the Saviour Church, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin condemned it on national

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<sup>36</sup> “After the Arab Spring, we had come to understand that Russia needed political and sexual emancipation, audacity, the feminist whip and a feminist president” (Pussy Riot, “The History of Pussy Riot,” in: Emily Neu / Jade French with Pussy Riot (eds.), *Let’s Start a Pussy Riot* (Rough Trade: London 2013), 22; Pussy Riot, “Art or Politics?,” in: Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom: Letters from Prison, Songs, Poems, and Courtroom Statements, Plus Tributes to the Punk Band That Shook the World* (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York: New York 2013), 15-16.

television and called for the persecution of the group's members. The next day he posted a blog on the *Orthodox Politics* website in which he argued that the art collective had violated statutes on anti-extremism, that their action was criminal, and that they had offended the feelings of believers. His comments were soon followed by a fast growing amount of official complaints against the group.<sup>37</sup>

On March 3, the very day before the controversial re-election of Vladimir Putin as president of Russia, two members of the group who had actually performed in the Christ the Saviour Church, were arrested. Maria Alyokhina (24) and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova (22) were charged with "hooliganism (that is, undermining civil order) motivated by religious hatred".<sup>38</sup> Yekaterina Samutsevich (29), a group member who had not participated in the performance, was arrested on March 15. On August 17 all three women were convicted and sentenced to two years of imprisonment in a penal colony. On October 10, 2012, this sentence was partly confirmed after an appeal to higher court by the accused women. This Moscow court upheld the two-year prison terms for Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova, but ordered Samutsevich freed with a suspended sentence. On December 29, 2013 the two imprisoned women were released under a general amnesty marking the twentieth anniversary of Russia's post-Soviet constitution.<sup>39</sup> This amnesty was proposed by President Putin several weeks before the start of the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014 and was immediately confirmed by the Russian parliament. Their liberation came four months before the women were due to be released.

The severe condemnations of the female performers of the *Punk Prayer* are obviously related to the sharp criticism that their act expressed with regard to the complicity of the Russian Orthodox Church in the authoritarian regime in

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<sup>37</sup> See Rachel L. Schroeder / Vyacheslav Karpov, "The Crimes and Punishments of the 'Enemies of the Church' and the Nature of Russia's Desecularising Regime," in: *Religion, State and Society* 41.3 (2013), 284-311.

<sup>38</sup> Indictment expressed by Judge Marina Syrova of the Moscow Khamovniki District Court. Cited in: Olga G. Voronina, "Pussy Riot Steal the Stage in the Moscow Cathedral of Christ the Saviour: Punk Prayer on Trial Online and in Court," in: *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media* 9 (2013), 72-75.

<sup>39</sup> In a gesture to mark the two decades since Russia adopted a new constitution in 1993, President Vladimir Putin announced a bill offering amnesty to people convicted of non-violent crimes (which actually concerned many persons of the political opposition). Political observers have regarded this as an attempt to appease the critics of Russia's human rights record before the Winter Olympics in Sochi in early 2014.

Russia, and to the fact that it referred to a series of high-profile incidents and public issues at that moment. The *Punk Prayer* act denounced corruption in the church, ridiculed the luxurious lifestyle of Patriarch Kirill, and decried the close connections between church and state security. It pointed to the dire consequences of the current repressive regime for women, LGBT persons, and those who take part in political opposition, groups who are all bereft of their freedom of speech, action and choice. This harsh criticism is articulated in lines shouted in punk style, alternated by a high-pitched, sung chorus consisting of the intercession of Mary as Mother of God, using Rachmaninoff's *Mary Vespers* so cherished by many Russians. In the chorus Mary is asked to "become a feminist", "join our protest" and "drive Putin away".

At their trial the women were accused of intending to openly express "disrespect for the Christian world and church canons", to "desecrate" the church and to "inflict deep wounds on Orthodox Christians". They were literally accused of committing a "maliciously conscious and thoroughly planned action of humiliation of the feelings and beliefs of multiple adherents of the Orthodox Christian confession and diminishment of the spiritual foundation of the state".<sup>40</sup> Further, according to the prosecutors, the offensive lyrics and indecent performance rendered the women's behavior "vulgar, impudent and cynical", which supported the charge of hooliganism.<sup>41</sup> The witnesses for the prosecution (church personnel, guards, and visitors) all attested that they felt hurt, outraged, or threatened by the shouting, movements, clothing, and gestures of the three women and by their appearance on the soleas, the space in front of the iconostasis.<sup>42</sup>

The three Pussy Riot members responded in much detail to the charges of religious hatred and blasphemy both in their speeches at their defence and in their open letters to President Medvedev and Patriarch Kyrill.<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, they rigorously denounced and ridiculed these charges and stated that the accusations as such reflected and affirmed the corrupt and intimidating Putin regime. On the other hand, they composed a series of refined arguments to prove that they had not intended to perform a blasphemous act at all. They claimed their act was not anti-religious, but a necessary critique of the abuse and corruption of the Russian Orthodox tradition through the new alliance between the Putin regime and the Russian Orthodox Church. Referring to

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<sup>40</sup> Schroeder / Karpov, "The Crimes and Punishments of the 'Enemies of the Church'," 297.

<sup>41</sup> "Prosecutor's Statement," in: Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot!*, 52-54.

<sup>42</sup> "Excerpts from the Court Transcript," in: Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot!*, 49-52.

<sup>43</sup> See Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot!*, 15-48; 87-118.

biblical texts as well as the works of philosophers, novelists, Russian dissidents, and contemporary feminist critics, they suggested that their own position might be more aligned with the original intentions and prophetic aspects of the Christian faith than that of their opponents. They expressed particular concern about the fact that core Christian values, such as love, justice, and selfless devotion, have been perverted by those in power and made an instrument of subordination, which turns “sons of God” into “slaves of God.”<sup>44</sup>

The *Punk Prayer* case attracted huge international attention and outrage. It evoked condemnations of the sentencing as well as acts of support for the women from human rights organizations, politicians, scholars, and artists worldwide, in particular in western countries. Vigils, protest actions, conferences, and research groups have been organized in response to the case. As a recent research project shows, the western media coverage of this case outside Russia is strongly framed in terms of the accused and convicted women being victims of repressive state and religious regimes and courageous heroines defending the freedom of speech and human rights, in particular the rights of women and LGBT persons.<sup>45</sup> In this framework, the religious aspects of the *Punk Prayer* and the subsequent legal proceedings are hardly discussed as such. The fact that the Pussy Riot collective created a “political art performance” in the form of a punk *prayer* and that the women were charged of a type of hooliganism motivated by *religious* hatred (and acted out as blasphemy) have been perceived in these media as effective tools for rebellion as well as for repression, but not as intrinsically meaningful gestures or stances.

For the Russian authorities who initiated the law suit and for the Church authorities involved, there never was any doubt that the Pussy Riot formation had seriously assaulted the Russian Orthodox faith and Church. The Russian media predominantly endorsed this perception and the majority of the Russian population affirmed that intolerable blasphemy had taken place.<sup>46</sup> The Russian state-related media even went so far as to report on a comparable blasphemous performance of Finnish Pussy Riot supporters in front of a cathedral in

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<sup>44</sup> Reference to the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, in: “Closing Courtroom Statement by Masha,” in: Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot!*, 106.

<sup>45</sup> See Tabitha M. van Zinnen, *Pussy Riot's Punk Prayer: Blasfemie, parrèsia en de strijd om vrijheid*. n.d. (<http://igitur-archief.library.uu.nl/student-theses/2013-0905-200911/UUindex.html>, 16 May 2014).

<sup>46</sup> See Schroeder / Karpov, “The Crimes and Punishments of the ‘Enemies of the Church’,” 292-298; Nicholas Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow,” in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81.4 (2013), 1061-1092.

Helsinki, Finland, that had resulted in a law suit and the conviction of the performers. This story was made up and circulated to legitimize the sentencing of the three members of the Pussy Riot formation.<sup>47</sup>

In the non-Russian western media a new interest in the religious aspects of the case emerged after the publication of the extensive and highly interesting texts that the accused women presented in court for their defence during their trial in August 2012. Now theologians also started to analyze the religious aspects of the performance, the law suit, and the defence. In particular the rich religious references and the high level of theological reflection in the women's self-defence were met with enthusiastic reactions. The women were praised for their nuanced views on religion and theology, and some theologians even recognized a kind of prayerfully radical sincerity in their performance and explanations. Professors of theology and philosophy publicly declared their admiration: Tom Beaudoin wondered whether the group was "intentionally or accidentally helping the church meet its own potential theological goals of distinguishing Christianity from state power".<sup>48</sup> Timothy Beal offered a refined analysis of the various types of theological argumentation (biblical, historical, and philosophical) the women deployed in their statements for the court and in other texts written during their imprisonment. According to Beal, "[t]aken together, these statements are nothing less than a radical theological apologia for Pussy Riot's media altar crash."<sup>49</sup>

However, returning to the critical remarks of Heather Walton and Marcella Althaus-Reid on the tendency among public theologians to globalize theological discourse and moralize specific theological agendas (including liberationist stances), I want to raise the question of whether reconstructions of Pussy Riot's statements for the defence in terms of their intentional or inadvertent contribution to established theological debates and goals help to understand, value, and support their act as feminist political protest. I doubt that this is the case, not only because, as these and other examples of theological interpretation show, no attention is paid at all to the gendered and feminist aspects of the *Punk Prayer* and its consequences. For instance, only female members

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<sup>47</sup> See Teivo Teivainen, "Girls by the Church: Construction of a Pussy Riot Event in Finland as a Threat to Russian Gender Roles and Sexual Norms" (forthcoming).

<sup>48</sup> Tom Beaudoin, "'Punk Prayer Service' in Moscow Cathedral," posted in *Rock and Theology* on 10 April 2012. (<http://www.rockandtheology.com/?p=5316>, 16 May 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Timothy Beal, "Pussy Riot's Theology," in: *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 17 September 2012. (<http://chronicle.com/article/Pussy-Riots-Theology/134398/>, 16 May 2014).

of the Pussy Riot formation were arrested and convicted, and the official charge of “hooliganism out of religious hatred” that was brought against them included gender specific accusations and argumentations concerning the three women’s “vulgar, impudent and cynical” behavior.

But even more important is the fact that this (attempted) theological interpretation and recognition of the *Punk Prayer* act fails to acknowledge the deeply hybrid and ambiguous character of this act, which I consider constitutive of its aim and function as feminist political protest. This performance critically addresses the oppressive Russian regime (in the tradition of Russian dissident activism) and the new alignment with and legitimization by the Russian Orthodox Church that this regime seeks, showing in particular the intimidating consequences for “the others” of these patriarchal sovereigns: women, homosexuals, political dissidents, and people unable to appropriate the “grace” and favors of the neo-liberal economy in its corrupt manifestations. In this act of protest, political analysis and theological arguments, secular and religious points of view, public and private interests, and rational and affective interpellations, all come together and cannot be clearly separated from each other. Moreover, this complexity is underlined by the very style and composition of this gesture of protest, with its many deliberately chosen multi-media details of time, location, bodily appearance, and movements, arrangements of sound and music, and its ingenious ritual and symbolic allusions, all forcing the audience to distinguish between sincerity and deception.

It is precisely this deliberate entanglement of views, positions, and styles that should be acknowledged in the *Punk Prayer* protest, in the accusations that it gave rise to, and in particular in the defence of the Pussy Riot members in which they reflect on their performance, its original intentions, and its actual impact on Russian society and abroad. In her court statements Pussy Riot member Yekaterina Samutsevich refers explicitly to the fact that this entanglement is intended. She eloquently analyses Putin’s “need to exploit the Orthodox religion and its aesthetics”. “Apparently, [Putin] felt the need for more convincing, transcendental guarantees of his long tenure at the helm. It was here that the need arose to make use of the aesthetics of the Orthodox religion, historically associated with the heyday of Imperial Russia, where power came not from earthly manifestations such as democratic elections and civil society, but from God Himself.”<sup>50</sup> According to Samutsevich,

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<sup>50</sup> “Closing Courtroom Statement by Katya,” in: Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot!*, 88.

the authorities took advantage of a certain deficit of Orthodox aesthetics in Soviet times, when the Orthodox religion had the aura of a lost history, of something crushed and damaged by the Soviet totalitarian regime, and was thus an opposition culture. The authorities decided to appropriate this historical effect of loss and present their new political project to restore Russia's lost spiritual values, a project which has little to do with a genuine concern for preservation of Russian Orthodoxy's history and culture.<sup>51</sup>

Samutsevitch sees her performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour with the song "Virgin Mary, put Putin away" not only as an act of protest against this manipulative turn to "Orthodox aesthetics" during election time. She also claims her performance to be an "unauthorized" alternative use of this Orthodox aesthetics. She states, "[i]n our performance we dared, without the Patriarch's blessing, to combine the visual image of Orthodox culture and protest culture, suggesting to smart people that Orthodox culture belongs not only to the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch and Putin, that it might also take the side of civic rebellion and protest in Russia."<sup>52</sup>

To conclude, what is so challenging in Pussy Riot's criticism that this act could become a landmark in the history of the suppression of political opposition in Putin's Russia? The observation that with its *Punk Prayer* act the Pussy Riot formation has created disorder and has deliberately disturbed the peace, and that the persons present in the church at that instant, in particular the faithful, have been unsettled and shocked by this unexpected event, is certainly not incorrect or purely fictitious. However, the charge of hooliganism out of religious hatred and the indictment of blasphemy are unwarranted, and reflect a malign identification of the current political order and exercise of power with the defence of the sacredness of Russian Orthodox culture and tradition.

In my view the *Punk Prayer* performance is not born out of religious hatred – this act is too creative, too complex, and too elaborate regarding its religious content and meaning to be possibly reduced to "religious hate".<sup>53</sup> The rich speeches for the defence of the accused women, in which a nuanced discussion of religion and blasphemy is made part of their defence, supports this interpretation. But I also want to emphasize the hybridity and ambiguity of this performance. In the *Punk Prayer* an uncanny appeal to Russian Orthodox

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<sup>51</sup> "Closing Courtroom Statement by Katya," in: Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot!*, 88.

<sup>52</sup> "Closing Courtroom Statement by Katya," in: Pussy Riot, *Pussy Riot!*, 89.

<sup>53</sup> Voronina, "Pussy Riot Steal the Stage," 69-85.

ritual and aesthetics can be found. By its appeal to Mary, Russia's patroness and Holy Mother, to chase Putin away and join the feminists, this act forms a paradoxical and scandalous prayer indeed.<sup>54</sup> The enactment of this prayer in Moscow's most prestigious cathedral, directly in front of the iconostasis, in brightly colored clothes, with a confusing mixture of respectful and disrespectful gestures, of fitting and unfitting singing and shouting, reflects the deeply ambiguous status and meaning of this performance.

The *Punk Prayer* act is brave because it is ingeniously composed. By choosing to seek recourse to Mary with an explicit Hail Mary Prayer in the central Moscow cathedral, on the one hand, the women appropriated a traditional religious ritual (that women and lay people are allowed to perform in this church), while, on the other hand, they completely transformed this prayer and acted it out in a novel way by invoking Mary's help to chase Putin away and begging Mary to become a feminist. They confined their act just to this prayer to attract a maximum of attention. But they stayed anonymous and did not place themselves in the role of Mary or Jesus (which would be considered the central act of transgression in the allegedly blasphemous western feminist religious works of art and performances of the past decade).<sup>55</sup> Their most salient transgression was that they performed their prayer immediately in front of the iconostasis, where in religious services only priests and pastors are allowed. This, in my view, underscores that the invocation of Mary is pivotal to this act. The appeal to Mary is both an act of *parrhesia* (a venue to speak uncompromising truth about current affairs)<sup>56</sup> and an act of faith (a vision of hope expressed with a longing in which all the senses and means of expressions are involved).

La Europa del siglo 21 se ha enfrentado a desarrollos sociales y académicos sustanciales presentando serios desafíos a la teología feminista "clásica", que se ha establecido principalmente en contextos occidentales y predominantemente cristianos. Desafíos incisivos surgen de desarrollos tales como (1) el aumento de los feminismos internacionales e interreligiosos (y su impacto en el estudio académico de la religión y el sexo); (2) cambios significativos de la posición y la agenda intelectual de la teología y los estudios religiosos en las universidades occidentales, que están fuertemente interconectados con la secularización y reconfessionalizing tendencias en Europa; y (3) el aumento de la presencia de la religión(es) en el dominio público

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<sup>54</sup> See Denysenko, "An Appeal to Mary," 1061-1092.

<sup>55</sup> Korte, "Madonna's Crucifixion"; Korte, "Blasphemous Feminist Art".

<sup>56</sup> Sergei Prozorov, "Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction," in: *Political Studies* (17 June 2012), doi: 10.1111/1467-9248.12047.

como “medio” o “ámbito” de los conflictos políticos y culturales. Este trabajo consiste en un esfuerzo por esbozar los contornos de una teología pública feminista europea que tiene como objetivo hacer frente a estos desafíos. La primera parte de este trabajo se presenta la posición y las tareas de esta teología feminista pública en relación con las dos reflexiones (feminista-teológica) en teología pública y teoría crítica a la post-secular. La última parte de este trabajo es un ejemplo de estas consideraciones a través de un análisis de la Oración Punk (“performance arte político”) de la formación rusa feminista Pussy Riot en la Iglesia de San Salvador, centro del cristianismo ortodoxo ruso, el 21 de febrero de 2012, que dio lugar a la acusación de “vandalismo motivado por el odio religioso” y el posterior enjuiciamiento y condena de las tres miembros del grupo en agosto de 2012. La atención se centra en la interrelación de los aspectos políticos, artísticos y teológicos, tanto en el desarrollo real y juicio correspondiente, en el cual una de las miembros acusadas defendió su actuación diciendo: “En nuestra actuación nos atrevimos, sin la bendición del Patriarca, para combinar la imagen visual de la cultura ortodoxa y cultura de protesta, lo que sugiere que la gente inteligente que la cultura ortodoxa no pertenece sólo a la Iglesia ortodoxa Rusa, al Patriarca o a Putin, sino a ellos, que también podrían ponerse del lado de la rebelión cívica y protestar en Rusia.”

21st-century Europe has faced substantial societal and academic developments that present serious challenges to “classic” feminist theology, which has been established mainly in western and predominantly Christian contexts. Incisive challenges emerge from developments such as (1) the rise of international and interfaith feminisms (and their impact on the academic study of religion and gender); (2) the significant changes of the position and intellectual agenda of theology and religious studies in western universities, which are strongly interconnected with both secularizing and reconfessionalizing tendencies in Europe; and (3) the increased presence of religion(s) in the public domain as “medium” or “arena” of political and cultural conflicts. This paper consist of an effort to sketch the outlines of a European feminist public theology that aims to address these challenges. The first parts of this paper discuss the position and tasks of this feminist public theology in relation to both (feminist-theological) reflections on public theology and to post-secular critical theory. The last part of this paper exemplifies these considerations through an analysis of the *Punk Prayer* (“political art performance”) of the Russian feminist formation Pussy Riot in Moscow’s central Russian Orthodox Christ the Saviour Church on February 21, 2012, which led to the accusation of “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred” and the subsequent prosecution and sentencing of three group members in August 2012. The focus is on the intertwining of political, artistic, and theological aspects in both the actual performance and the corresponding court case, in which one of the accused members defended their performance by stating: “In our performance we dared, without the Patriarch’s blessing, to combine the visual image of Orthodox culture and protest culture, suggesting to smart people that

Orthodox culture belongs not only to the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch and Putin, that it might also take the side of civic rebellion and protest in Russia.”

Europa im 21. Jh. steht grundlegenden sozialen und akademischen Entwicklungen gegenüber, die eine ernsthafte Herausforderung für “klassische” feministische Theologie darstellen, die sich hauptsächlich im westlichen, christlichen Kontext entwickelte. Einschneidende Herausforderungen entstehen aus Veränderungen, wie (1) dem Entstehen von internationalen und inter-religiösen Feminismen (und ihrem Einfluss auf die akademische Forschung im Bereich Gender und Religion); (2) wichtigen Veränderungen in der Position und intellektuellen Agenda von Theologie und Religionswissenschaften an westlichen Universitäten, die sowohl mit säkularisierenden als auch rekonfessionalisierenden Tendenzen in Europa stark verbunden sind; und (3) die wachsende Präsenz von Religion(en) in der Öffentlichkeit als “Medium” oder “Arena” von politischen und kulturellen Konflikten. Dieser Beitrag versucht, die Umrisse einer europäischen feministischen *Public Theology* zu skizzieren, die darauf abzielt, diese Herausforderungen anzunehmen. Die ersten Abschnitte dieses Artikels diskutieren die Position und Aufgaben dieser feministischen *Public Theology* im Verhältnis zu (feministisch-theologischen) Reflektionen über *Public Theology* und zu postsäkularer kritischer Theorie. Der letzte Abschnitt dieses Artikels illustriert diese Überlegungen durch eine Analyse des *Punk Prayer* (eine “politische Kunstperformance”) der russischen feministischen Formation Pussy Riot in der zentralen russisch-orthodoxen Christ-Erlöser-Kathedrale in Moskau am 21. Februar 2012, die zur Anklage wegen “Rowdytum motiviert von religiösem Hass” und der folgenden Anklage und Verurteilung von drei Mitgliedern im August 2012 führte. Der Fokus ist auf die Verbindung von politischen, künstlerischen und theologischen Aspekten in der Performance und der Gerichtsverhandlung gerichtet, in der eines der angeklagten Mitglieder ihre Performance so verteidigte: “In unserer Performance wagten wir es, ohne den Segen des Patriarchen visuelle Elemente der orthodoxen Kultur und der Protestkultur zu kombinieren und damit verständigen Menschen anzudeuten, dass die orthodoxe Kultur nicht nur der russisch-orthodoxen Kirche, dem Patriarchen und Putin gehört, sondern dass sie auch auf der Seite von bürgerlicher Rebellion und Protest in Russland stehen könnte.”

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