

Gendered Spiritualities in the Perspective of Meredith B. McGuire: A Sociology of Religion Analysis of Everyday Religious Practice

Ai Siti Nurmiati¹, Tetep Abdulatip², Dody S. Truna³, Rifki Rosyad⁴

^{1,2,3,4}*Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University Bandung, Indonesia*

E-mail: aisukabumi21@gmail.com

Inputted : July 1, 2026

Revised : July 23, 2026

Accepted: August 15, 2026

Published: August 21, 2026

Abstract

*This article examines the concept of gendered spiritualities proposed by Meredith B. McGuire in her work *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Using a literature-based approach and descriptive-critical analysis within the framework of the sociology of religion, this study finds that McGuire emphasizes that spirituality is not neutral, but is shaped by gender construction, embodiment, and the everyday practices of individuals. This concept serves as a critique of approaches to religion that are overly oriented toward institutions and formal doctrine. Furthermore, this article shows that McGuire's approach has relevance to the Indonesian context, particularly in understanding gender-based religious practices that are lived out in the daily lives of believers. Nevertheless, this concept also has limitations, particularly with regard to generalization and the lack of an intersectional approach.*

Keywords: gender; spirituality; lived religion; sociology of religion.

Citation:

Nurmiati, A. S., Abdulatip, T., Truna, D. S., & Rosyad, R. (2026). Gendered spiritualities in the perspective of Meredith B. McGuire: A sociology of religion analysis of everyday religious practice. *MSJ: Majority Science Journal*, 4(3), 74–85. <https://doi.org/10.61942/msj.v4i3.628>

Corresponding Author:

Ai Siti Nurmiati

aisukabumi21@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Religious studies from a classical perspective generally position religion as a structured system consisting of doctrine, institutions, and formal authority that governs the lives of believers. This approach tends to focus on sacred texts, theological systems, and religious organizations as its primary units of analysis. Within this framework, religion is often understood as normative, stable, and uniform, leaving little room for dynamic and contextual individual experience (Durkheim, 1995). However, with the development of the sociology of religion, criticism has emerged toward this approach, which is considered overly reductionist because it neglects the dimensions of practice and everyday religious experience.

In response to these limitations, scholars began to develop more experience-oriented approaches, one of which is the concept of lived religion. This approach emphasizes that religion should not only be understood as a set of formal teachings, but also as a practice lived out in the daily lives of individuals. Consequently, the focus of study shifts from what individuals "should" do according to religious teachings toward what they "actually" do within their social reality (Orsi, 1997). Religious practice within the framework of lived religion is often flexible, adaptive, and shaped by social context, culture, and personal experience. Indeed, such practice not infrequently diverges from the official teachings established by religious institutions (Ammerman, 2013).

It is within this context that Meredith B. McGuire, in her work *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, makes an important contribution by highlighting the everyday and embodied dimensions of religious experience. One of her key ideas is the concept of gendered spiritualities, the view that spirituality is not neutral but is shaped by social construction, particularly gender (McGuire, 2008). From this perspective, gender is understood not merely as the biological difference between men and women, but as a social construction that shapes how individuals interact with the world, including in the practice of religion.

McGuire asserts that spiritual experience is always connected to the body (embodiment), emotion, and the social relations that individuals possess. Because the human body has been "gendered" through social and cultural processes, the religious experience of individuals is likewise inseparable from the influence of gender (McGuire, 2008). Accordingly, the way a person prays, meditates, participates in ritual, or even interprets suffering and healing can differ according to their gendered experience. This shows that spirituality is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood universally without considering the surrounding social context.

Furthermore, the concept of gendered spiritualities opens space for understanding how religious practice can become an arena of negotiation between individuals and social structures. In many cases, individuals—particularly women—develop alternative forms of spirituality that do not always align with the formal, often patriarchal, structures of religion (Woodhead, 2002). This approach thus not only offers a new understanding of religion as a lived practice, but also contributes to a critical analysis of power relations within religious traditions.

Based on this background, the present article aims to systematically examine the concept of gendered spiritualities proposed by McGuire, and to assess its relevance and the critiques directed toward it within the context of contemporary religious studies. In addition, this study seeks to demonstrate that this approach holds important significance for understanding religious practice in diverse societies, including within the Indonesian context, which is rich in religious expression grounded in everyday experience.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative library research method (*studi literatur*) with a descriptive-critical approach, situated within the framework of the sociology of religion. The primary source of data is Meredith B. McGuire's *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (2008), particularly the sections addressing the concept of gendered spiritualities. Data were also drawn from a range of secondary sources, including books and peer-reviewed journal articles on the sociology of religion, lived religion, gender theory, and embodiment, in order to situate McGuire's argument within a broader scholarly conversation.

Data were collected through documentary study, involving the identification, selection, and examination of texts relevant to the themes of gender, spirituality, and lived religion. The data were first analyzed descriptively to reconstruct McGuire's central arguments, and were then examined through a critical analysis that evaluates the strengths and limitations of her framework—particularly its capacity for generalization, its attention (or lack thereof) to intersectionality, and its applicability beyond the Western context in which it was originally developed. This critical reading is further extended through a contextual analysis that considers the relevance of the gendered spiritualities framework for understanding everyday religious practice in Indonesia..

3. Results and Discussion

Theoretical Framework: Lived Religion and Gender

The Concept of Lived Religion

The concept of *lived religion* is one of the most important approaches within contemporary sociology of religion, seeking to shift the focus of analysis from religion as a normative system toward religion as a practice lived out in everyday life. This approach emerged as a critique of the classical paradigm, which tends to place religion within an institutional, doctrinal, and textual framework, thereby paying insufficient attention to the concrete experience of individuals in living out their beliefs (Durkheim, 1995). In the classical perspective, religion is often understood as a fixed and binding body of teaching, whereas in the *lived religion* approach, religion is viewed as something dynamic, contextual, and continually negotiated within social life.

Conceptually, *lived religion* refers to the way individuals understand, interpret, and practice religion in their daily lives, whether through formal rituals or informal practices that are often not institutionalized. Robert A. Orsi explains that "lived" religion is not always identical to the religion officially taught by institutions, but rather the outcome of an interaction between teaching, personal experience, and the socio-cultural context in which individuals find themselves (Orsi, 1997). This approach thus opens space for the diversity of religious expression that has often been overlooked in normative religious studies.

Furthermore, Nancy T. Ammerman argues that *lived religion* encompasses a wide range of everyday practices, including personal prayer, spiritual habits, emotional experiences, and small acts not always regarded as formal religious activity (Ammerman, 2013). In this context, the boundary between the "religious" and the "non-religious" becomes increasingly fluid, as individuals frequently integrate spiritual values into everyday activities such as work, caring for family, or coping with life's difficulties. This shows that religion is not confined to places of worship or formal institutions, but is present across many aspects of human life.

The *lived religion* approach also emphasizes the importance of subjective experience in understanding religion. Religious meaning, in other words, is determined not solely by religious authority, but also by individuals' interpretation of their own experience. McGuire, in *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, states that religious practice is often flexible and adaptive, and may even diverge from officially professed teachings (McGuire, 2008). Here, individuals are not merely passive recipients of religious teaching, but active agents who shape and modify religious practice according to their own needs and circumstances.

Accordingly, the *lived religion* approach carries important implications for the shift in focus within religious studies: from text to practice, from institution to experience, and from doctrine to everyday life. This shift indicates that religion cannot be fully understood merely through analysis of texts or formal structures, but must be examined within the concrete practices lived out by individuals in their social lives. Within this framework, religious practice becomes an arena in which culture, economics, social relations, and individual identity interact with one another.

In addition, this approach also opens space for examining dimensions that had previously received little attention, such as *embodiment*, emotion, and power relations within religious practice. McGuire emphasizes that religious experience always involves the body and cannot be separated from the surrounding social conditions (McGuire, 2008). *Lived religion*, therefore, addresses not only what individuals do, but also how they feel and interpret that experience within the context of their lives.

In relation to gender, the *lived religion* approach becomes highly relevant, as it enables a deeper analysis of how gender differences shape religious practice and experience. Gender, as a social construction, shapes the roles, expectations, and experiences of individuals in society, including in religious life. Using the *lived religion* perspective, researchers can examine how men and women live out spirituality differently in their daily practice, without being confined to rigid normative categories.

Thus, the concept of *lived religion* not only provides a more comprehensive analytical framework for religious studies, but also serves as an important foundation for understanding the concept of *gendered spiritualities* developed by McGuire. Through this approach, religion is understood as a living, dynamic phenomenon, continually transformed through the interaction between individuals and their social context.

Gender as a Social Construction

Within the perspective of the sociology of religion and gender studies, gender is no longer understood merely as the biological difference between men and women, but as a social construction shaped through historical, cultural, and relational processes. Gender refers to the set of roles, norms, expectations, and identities that society attaches to individuals on the basis of their sex (Oakley, 1972). Gender is therefore dynamic and can vary from one society to another, and may even change over the course of social development.

Understanding gender as a social construction has been strongly influenced by Judith Butler, who argues that gender is not something one "has" in a fixed sense, but something "performed" through everyday action (Butler, 1990). Gender identity, in this view, is formed through the continual repetition of social practice, such that it comes to appear natural. This perspective is significant for religious studies because it opens space to examine how religious practice both shapes and is shaped by the construction of gender.

In the religious context, gender plays a significant role in determining how individuals participate in religious life. Linda Woodhead shows that there are differing patterns of participation between men and women across various religious traditions, both in terms of the intensity of involvement and the type of activity pursued (Woodhead, 2002). Women, for example, tend to be more active in community-based religious activities and devotional practices, while men are more often involved in formal institutional structures and leadership. This difference, however, is not universal, but shaped by particular social and cultural contexts.

Beyond shaping religious participation, gender also plays a role in forming the kinds of spiritual practice individuals pursue. In many cases, women's spiritual practice tends to be associated with relational aspects, care, and healing, whereas men's spiritual practice is more often linked to rationality, authority, and formal structure (Gilligan, 1982). McGuire asserts that this difference is not a reflection of biological nature, but the result of the social construction that shapes individuals' lived experience from the outset (McGuire, 2008). Spiritual practice thus becomes an arena in which gender values are simultaneously reproduced and negotiated.

Furthermore, gender also shapes the meaning attached to religious experience. Individuals do not merely carry out religious practice; they also interpret that experience according to their social background and gender identity. Nancy T. Ammerman explains that religious experience is always mediated by the social narratives available within society, including narratives about gender roles (Ammerman, 2013). Experiences of suffering, sacrifice, or devotion, for example, are often interpreted differently by men and women because of the differing social expectations placed upon each.

Within the framework of *lived religion*, gender is one of the key factors shaping everyday religious experience. Religious practice reflects not only normative teaching, but also the social realities individuals face, including gender-based power relations. In many religious traditions,

patriarchal structures continue to shape the distribution of authority and legitimacy, such that women often have limited space within formal leadership (Scott, 1986). This limitation, however, does not mean that women are entirely passive; on the contrary, they frequently develop alternative strategies for expressing their spirituality, for instance through informal practices or experience-based communities.

This approach shows that religion can become a complex arena in which gender functions not only as an analytical category, but also as a factor that constitutes social reality itself. By understanding gender as a social construction, researchers can see that religious practice is not neutral, but shaped by broader social relations. This is consistent with McGuire's view that spirituality is always *embodied*—that is, experienced through a body that has itself been shaped by social norms, including gender.

Analysis of gender in religious studies is therefore important not only for understanding the differing religious experiences of men and women, but also for uncovering the hidden power structures within religious practice. This approach enables religious studies to become more inclusive and contextual, creating space for experiences that have long been marginalized within mainstream religious discourse.

Embodiment: The Body in Spirituality

In contemporary sociology of religion, the concept of *embodiment* has become an important approach for understanding religious experience more comprehensively. This approach emphasizes that religion involves not only belief or cognition, but also the body as the primary medium through which spirituality is experienced, expressed, and given meaning. In other words, religious experience cannot be separated from the physical and emotional dimensions individuals experience in their daily lives (Morgan, 2010).

McGuire, in *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, asserts that religious practice is always *embodied*—lived out through a body that feels, moves, and interacts with its social environment (McGuire, 2008). From this perspective, activities such as prayer, *dhikr*, meditation, or other religious rituals are not merely symbolic acts, but experiences involving bodily sensation, emotion, and psychological states. This indicates that spirituality is a holistic experience, encompassing cognitive, affective, and somatic dimensions simultaneously.

The concept of *embodiment* is also closely related to the thought of Thomas J. Csordas, who regards the body as "the subject of experience" rather than merely a passive object (Csordas, 1990). In this view, the body is not simply an instrument for carrying out religious practice, but the primary locus in which religious meaning is produced and felt. Spiritual experience is thus understood not solely as the outcome of intellectual reflection, but as something experienced directly through the body—for example, as a sense of peace, an emotional resonance, or even an experience of healing.

Furthermore, the *embodiment* approach emphasizes that the human body is never neutral, but is always situated within a particular social construction. The body has been "shaped" by social norms, values, and expectations, including those pertaining to gender. Bryan S. Turner argues that the body is a social entity regulated by various structures of power and culture that influence how individuals understand themselves and interact with the world (Turner, 2008). Religious experience is therefore also inseparable from the social construction embedded in the body.

In this context, McGuire emphasizes that because the body has been socially "gendered," spiritual experience is likewise shaped by gender. Men and women, that is, not only differ biologically, but also undergo different processes of socialization in understanding and expressing their bodies. This difference is subsequently reflected in religious practice—in the way one prays, in forms of emotional expression, and in the kinds of ritual one follows. Women in many religious traditions, for example, are often associated with relational and emotional forms of spiritual practice, while men are more often associated with formal and structural practice. This difference, however, is not essential, but the result of a social construction that can change according to cultural context.

In addition, the dimension of *embodiment* also allows for an understanding of the relationship between spirituality and concrete experiences such as illness, suffering, and

healing. Arthur Kleinman shows that the experience of illness is not merely medical, but carries deep social and religious meaning (Kleinman, 1988). In many cases, religious practices such as prayer, healing rituals, or meditation become ways for individuals to respond to their bodily condition. The body thus becomes a meeting point between biological, social, and spiritual experience.

This approach also broadens the understanding of religion as a phenomenon inseparable from everyday life. Through *embodiment*, religious practice is understood as part of the routines of life that directly engage the body, such as the movements of prayer, fasting, or ascetic practice. Such activities carry not only symbolic meaning, but also shape bodily experience, which in turn influences how individuals understand their own spirituality.

In relation to the concept of *gendered spiritualities*, *embodiment* is key to explaining how religious experience differs between individuals according to their gender identity. Because the body is the primary medium of spiritual experience, and that body has been shaped by gender construction, the spirituality individuals experience will likewise reflect that difference. Analysis of *embodiment* thus enables religious studies to become more sensitive to individuals' concrete experience, while also revealing how social relations, including gender, play a role in shaping religious practice.

Overall, the concept of *embodiment* makes an important contribution to religious studies by affirming that spirituality is not merely a matter of belief or doctrine, but also an experience lived through the body. This approach enriches the analysis of *lived religion* by highlighting the physical and emotional dimensions that are often overlooked in normative approaches to religion, thereby rendering the understanding of religion more holistic, contextual, and attuned to the complexity of human life.

Gendered Spiritualities according to McGuire

Spirituality as a Gendered Practice

Within the framework of contemporary sociology of religion, spirituality is no longer regarded as universal and neutral, but as a social practice shaped by various factors, including gender. McGuire, in *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, argues that gender plays a significant role in shaping how individuals experience and practice spirituality in their daily lives. In other words, spirituality is not merely a matter of internal belief, but also a practice produced and reproduced through social interaction saturated with gender construction.

McGuire argues that gender influences nearly every aspect of human life, including religiosity and spirituality (McGuire, 2008). This is evident in the different patterns men and women often display in carrying out religious practice. Such differences are apparent not only in levels of participation, but also in the forms of practice, orientations of meaning, and ways of expressing religious experience. Within this framework, spirituality can be understood as a "gendered practice," one shaped by the norms, values, and social expectations attached to gender.

In many social contexts, for example, women tend to place greater emphasis on the relational dimension of their spirituality. Women's religious practice is often oriented toward interpersonal relationships, such as concern for family, community, and activities grounded in social solidarity. Women are also often involved in spiritual practices related to care and healing, whether through prayer, ritual, or alternative healing practices (Gilligan, 1982). This suggests that women's spirituality is often closely tied to strong emotional and relational experience.

Men, by contrast, are in many religious traditions more often associated with formal structures and institutional authority. They tend to be more involved in religious leadership, decision-making, and normative, structured activity (Woodhead, 2002). This pattern reflects a gender-based division of roles deeply rooted in many societies, in which men are associated with rationality and authority, while women are associated with emotion and relationship. It is important to note, however, that this division is not absolute and can differ depending on social and cultural context.

McGuire firmly rejects the essentialist view that regards such differences as biological or given by nature. She argues instead that differences in spiritual practice between men and women are the result of social construction, formed through a lengthy process of socialization. Individuals, in this sense, learn to perform particular gender roles through social interaction, including within religious contexts. Spirituality thus reflects not only individual belief, but also the surrounding social structure.

This view is consistent with Judith Butler's theory of the social construction of gender, which holds that gender is the result of continually repeated social practice (*performativity*), such that it comes to appear natural (Butler, 1990). In the context of spirituality, religious practice becomes one arena in which gender identity is produced and reproduced. Women who are active in community-based religious activities, for instance, are not only carrying out spiritual practice, but simultaneously reinforcing their gender identity as caring and relational individuals.

Furthermore, this approach also allows for a critical analysis of power relations within religious practice. Joan Wallach Scott emphasizes that gender is an important analytical category for understanding how power is distributed within society (Scott, 1986). In many religious traditions, male dominance within formal structures reflects a gender inequality legitimized by particular religious interpretations. Yet, on the other hand, women often find alternative spaces to express their spirituality outside these formal structures.

Within the context of *lived religion*, this gendered spiritual practice reflects not only existing social structures, but also becomes an arena of negotiation for individuals. Women, for instance, may develop more flexible and contextual forms of spirituality that allow them to continue fulfilling religious roles despite occupying limited positions within formal structures. This shows that individuals are not entirely passive in the face of gender construction, but possess the capacity to interpret and modify spiritual practice according to their own experience.

The concept of spirituality as a gendered practice thus offers a deeper understanding of how religion is lived out in daily life. This approach affirms that spirituality cannot be separated from social context, including the gender construction that shapes individual experience. It also opens space for recognizing the diversity of religious practice often overlooked within normative approaches. Analysis of *gendered spiritualities* is therefore important for understanding religion as a living, dynamic, and contextual phenomenon.

Critique of Gender Hierarchy in Religion

In contemporary sociology of religion, one important issue receiving considerable attention is the relationship between religion and power, particularly with regard to gender. Many religious traditions around the world exhibit a tendency toward male dominance in leadership structures, religious authority, and doctrinal interpretation. This phenomenon reflects not only a patriarchal social reality, but also shows how religion can play a role in reproducing and legitimizing gender inequality (Turner, 1991).

McGuire, in *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, argues that gender hierarchy in religion cannot be separated from the way religious meaning is attached to the male and female body (McGuire, 2008). In many traditions, the male body is often associated with authority, rationality, and leadership, while the female body is more often associated with emotion, domesticity, and subordination. This construction subsequently becomes not only a social norm, but also acquires religious legitimacy through text, ritual, and practice.

Religion, therefore, functions not merely as a belief system, but also as a social institution that shapes and sustains structures of power. Joan Wallach Scott emphasizes that gender is an important analytical category for understanding how power relations operate within society (Scott, 1986). Within religion, such power relations are often manifested in the restriction of women's access to leadership positions, interpretive authority, and religious public space.

Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu, through the concept of symbolic power, explains that domination does not always operate explicitly, but also through symbols, language, and practices regarded as "natural" by society (Bourdieu, 2001). In many cases, gender inequality

within religion is accepted as natural because it has become internalized within the collective consciousness of believers. The restriction of women's roles in religious leadership, for instance, is often justified through interpretations of religious texts regarded as normative, even though such interpretations are in fact the product of social and historical construction.

From this perspective, critique of gender hierarchy in religion aims not merely to expose existing inequality, but also to show that such structures are constructed and therefore capable of change. Fatima Mernissi, for example, shows that many restrictions placed on women in Islam derive not from normative teaching, but from patriarchal interpretations that developed historically (Mernissi, 1991). This suggests that religion, as a system of meaning, holds the potential to be interpreted differently depending on social context and perspective.

In a similar vein, Amina Wadud emphasizes the importance of a gender-sensitive hermeneutical approach in understanding religious texts (Wadud, 1999). An inclusive and contextual reading, in her view, can open space for reinterpreting religious teaching in more just and equitable ways. This approach demonstrates that religion need not always serve as an instrument for legitimizing inequality, but can also become a source of progressive social transformation.

Within the framework of *lived religion*, critique of gender hierarchy can also be observed in individuals' everyday practice. Although the formal structure of religion is often patriarchal, in practice many women develop alternative forms of spirituality that provide space for active participation. Ammerman shows that everyday religious practice is often not entirely subject to formal structures, but is instead shaped by individual experience and need (Ammerman, 2013). There exists, accordingly, a space of negotiation in which individuals can reinterpret gender roles and identity within a religious context.

It must be acknowledged, however, that change within religious structures is not always easily achieved, as it is bound up with deeply rooted tradition, authority, and legitimacy. Critique of gender hierarchy in religion therefore needs to be undertaken comprehensively, not only through theoretical analysis, but also through practical approaches involving change in the ways believers think and act.

Overall, analysis of gender hierarchy in religion shows that religion holds a dual role: it reflects social reality while also serving as an agent capable of reinforcing or challenging that reality. Understanding this dynamic allows religious studies to make a more critical and constructive contribution toward creating a more just and inclusive religious life.

Spirituality as a Negotiated Space

In contemporary sociology of religion, religion is no longer understood merely as a rigid normative system that unilaterally determines individual behavior. Instead, religion is viewed as a dynamic arena in which individuals actively interpret, adjust, and even negotiate religious practice according to their social conditions, life experience, and personal needs. This approach aligns with the concept of *lived religion*, which positions individuals as active agents in shaping their own religious experience, rather than passive recipients of institutional teaching (Orsi, 1997).

McGuire, in *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, argues that although social and religious structures impose certain constraints, individuals nevertheless retain space to interpret and adapt their spiritual practice (McGuire, 2008). Spirituality, in this sense, can be understood as a "negotiated space"—a space in which individuals engage with existing norms and values while adjusting them to the realities of everyday life. This process of negotiation shows that religious practice is not static, but continually changes through the interaction between individuals and social structure.

One important aspect of this negotiated space is the role of gender. In many religious traditions, women often face limited access to formal structures, such as religious leadership or interpretive authority. Such limitations, however, do not entirely prevent women from expressing their spirituality. On the contrary, many women develop alternative, more flexible and contextual forms of spirituality outside formal institutions (Woodhead, 2002). Such practice may take the form of community-based religious activity, informal ritual, or spiritual practice oriented toward personal experience.

Ammerman explains that everyday religious practice often does not fully follow the formal structures established by religious institutions, but is instead shaped by individual needs and experience (Ammerman, 2013). Women, in this respect, play an important role in shaping more contextual religious practice—for example, through activities such as *majelis taklim* (religious study groups), communal prayer, or spiritually based healing practices. Such activities demonstrate that spirituality need not always operate within an institutional framework, but can also flourish within more informal social spaces.

This concept of negotiation can also be understood through Michel de Certeau's distinction between "strategies" and "tactics" (de Certeau, 1984). Here, "strategies" refer to the formal structures established by institutions, while "tactics" are the creative means individuals use to navigate and adjust to those structures. Women's spiritual practice outside formal institutions can accordingly be seen as a form of "tactics"—an effort to continue practicing spirituality despite structural constraints.

In addition, the negotiated space within spirituality also shows that individuals possess agency in shaping their religious identity. Saba Mahmood, in her study of Muslim women, shows that religious practice cannot always be understood as a form of resistance to patriarchal structures, but also as a way in which individuals shape themselves within the framework of the religious values they hold (Mahmood, 2005). This suggests that negotiation does not always signify a rejection of structure, but may also take the form of reflective adaptation and internalization.

In this context, spirituality becomes a space in which individuals can combine various elements—religious teaching, personal experience, and cultural values—to create religious practice suited to their own lives. This process often produces hybrid forms of spirituality that combine the formal and the informal, the traditional and the modern, and the institutional and the personal. Religion, accordingly, is no longer understood as a monolithic system, but as a plural and dynamic phenomenon.

It is important to note, however, that this negotiated space is not entirely free from structures of power. Although individuals possess agency, they remain situated within social constraints that shape their choices and actions. Analysis of spirituality as a negotiated space must therefore consider the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, in which both continuously shape one another in the formation of religious practice.

Overall, the concept of spirituality as a negotiated space offers a more complex perspective for understanding the relationship between religion, the individual, and society. This approach shows that religious practice is determined not only by normative teaching, but also by processes of social interaction involving interpretation, adaptation, and individual creativity. Within the framework of *gendered spiritualities*, this negotiated space is essential for understanding how women and men develop differing spiritual practices, while simultaneously challenging and reshaping existing social structures.

Relevance to the Indonesian Context

The concept of *gendered spiritualities* proposed by McGuire holds significant relevance for Indonesian society, which is plural, religious, and rich in religious practices grounded in everyday experience. Within the framework of the sociology of religion, this approach helps explain that religious practice does not always follow the formal structures established by religious institutions, but is strongly shaped by social experience, local culture, and the gender constructions that develop within society (McGuire, 2008).

Indonesia, as a society with a high degree of religiosity, exhibits a diversity of religious expression that cannot always be explained through normative approaches. In practice, religion is often carried out through informal, contextual, and community-based everyday activity. The concepts of *lived religion* and *gendered spiritualities* are therefore highly relevant for understanding this dynamic, particularly in observing how men and women live out their spirituality differently in daily life (Orsi, 1997).

One concrete example can be seen in the role of women in religious activities such as *majelis taklim*. *Majelis taklim* represent an important socio-religious space for Muslim women

in Indonesia, in which they gain not only religious knowledge but also build social networks and community solidarity. Martin van Bruinessen shows that *majelis taklim* have become one of the most rapidly growing forms of religious expression in Indonesia, particularly among women (van Bruinessen, 1995). Women, in this context, are not merely passive participants, but active agents who shape religious practice based on their own experience and needs.

In addition, spiritual healing practices also show how spirituality in Indonesia is often *embodied* and contextual. In many communities, practices such as *ruqyah*, traditional medicine, or prayer-based healing rituals form an important part of religious life. Clifford Geertz, in his study of religion in Java, shows that religious practice is often inseparable from local belief and everyday lived experience (Geertz, 1960). Women, in this context, frequently play important roles as both practitioners and participants in spiritual healing practices, indicating a gendered dimension to this religious experience.

Community-based religious rituals offer a further example of the relevance of *gendered spiritualities* in Indonesia. Activities such as *pengajian*, *tahlilan*, *yasinan*, and other religious celebrations often involve the active participation of women in ways that differ from men. Robert W. Hefner argues that religious practice in Indonesia is strongly shaped by local social and cultural context, producing diverse and dynamic forms of religiosity (Hefner, 1997). Women, in this respect, often serve as both guardians of tradition and innovators within community-based religious practice.

Furthermore, the *gendered spiritualities* approach also helps reveal how religious practice in Indonesia becomes an arena of negotiation among religious norms, local culture, and individual experience. Although formal structures remain largely patriarchal, in practice women find space to express their spirituality through various informal activities. Ammerman notes that everyday religious practice is often not entirely subject to institutional structure, but is instead shaped by individual needs and experience (Ammerman, 2013)—a pattern clearly visible in the flexible and context-adaptive religious practices found across Indonesia.

It is important to note, however, that the relevance of this concept must also be understood critically. Indonesia possesses an extremely complex diversity of culture, ethnicity, and religious tradition, such that spiritual experience cannot be simply generalized. Factors such as social class, education, and urbanization also shape how individuals carry out religious practice. The *gendered spiritualities* approach therefore needs to be combined with other, more contextual and intersectional perspectives in order to produce a more comprehensive analysis.

Overall, the concept of *gendered spiritualities* makes an important contribution to understanding religious practice in Indonesia as a living, dynamic phenomenon shaped by multiple social factors. This approach enables a deeper analysis of how gender shapes religious experience, while also opening space for recognizing the diversity of religious practice that continues to develop within society. Religious studies, accordingly, need not be confined to normative aspects alone, but must also encompass complex and contextual social realities.

Critical Assessment of McGuire's Concept

The concept of *gendered spiritualities* proposed by McGuire in *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* makes an important contribution to broadening the scope of the sociology of religion, particularly in understanding religion as lived practice shaped by gender construction (McGuire, 2008). This approach, nevertheless, is not free from critique that must be considered in order to enrich the analysis and avoid excessive simplification. Such critiques concern, in particular, the risk of gender generalization, the limited attention to intersectionality, and the Western bias underlying the theory.

Gender Generalization

One of the primary critiques directed at the concept of *gendered spiritualities* concerns its tendency to generalize the differences between men and women. In some analyses, women are often associated with relational, emotional, and experience-based spirituality, while men are linked to practice that is more rational, structural, and institutional. Although McGuire

maintains that such differences are the result of social construction, this approach nonetheless risks oversimplifying the complexity of individual experience (McGuire, 2008).

Judith Butler criticizes approaches that tend to treat gender as a stable and homogeneous category, arguing that such treatment can obscure the diversity of experience within each gender category (Butler, 1990). Not all women share the same spiritual experience, nor do all men. Factors such as social background, education, and life experience can produce a very wide range of variation in religious practice. Analysis that places excessive emphasis on gender difference therefore risks overlooking the internal dynamics within each group.

Lack of an Intersectional Perspective

A second critique concerns the insufficient attention given to intersectionality within McGuire's concept. The intersectional approach, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes that individual identity is shaped not by a single factor such as gender alone, but by multiple interacting factors, including social class, ethnicity, religion, and culture (Crenshaw, 1991). An individual's spiritual experience, from this perspective, cannot be understood through the category of gender alone, but must be seen as the outcome of the interaction among these various dimensions of identity.

The religious experience of middle-class urban women, for example, will differ from that of women in rural areas or from lower economic groups. Likewise, ethnic and local cultural factors can shape the forms of religious practice individuals pursue. Patricia Hill Collins argues that social analysis that fails to consider intersectionality tends to produce a partial and incomplete understanding (Collins, 2000). The concept of *gendered spiritualities*, accordingly, needs to be further developed by incorporating an intersectional perspective in order to more fully capture the complexity of religious experience.

Western Bias

Another important critique concerns the tendency toward Western bias within McGuire's theory. As a scholar based in the United States, McGuire's analysis draws substantially on the context of Western society, with its own particular social, cultural, and religious characteristics. This raises the question of the extent to which the concept can be applied universally, particularly within non-Western contexts such as Indonesia.

Talal Asad reminds us that concepts within religious studies are often shaped by Western historical experience, and are therefore not always relevant when applied to different cultural contexts (Asad, 1993). In Indonesian society, for instance, religious practice is strongly shaped by local tradition, communal values, and the distinctive interaction between religion and culture. Application of the *gendered spiritualities* concept therefore needs to be adjusted to local contexts to avoid producing a biased or reductive analysis.

In addition, Clifford Geertz, in his study of religion in Indonesia, shows that societal religiosity cannot be separated from the complex structure of local culture (Geertz, 1960). This suggests that approaches overly oriented toward Western experience risk overlooking the distinctiveness of religious practice in other societies. Contextualizing McGuire's theory is therefore necessary in order to produce a more accurate and relevant understanding.

Critical Affirmation

Despite these various critiques, it must be acknowledged that the concept of *gendered spiritualities* continues to make a significant contribution by opening new perspectives within religious studies. These critiques are not intended to reject McGuire's theory, but rather to enrich and develop it so that it becomes more sensitive to social and cultural complexity. By integrating an intersectional perspective with a contextual approach, this concept can become a more powerful analytical tool for understanding religious practice across diverse contexts, including in Indonesia.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

McGuire's concept of gendered spiritualities makes an important contribution to religious studies by emphasizing that spirituality is contextual, embodied, and shaped by gender. This approach broadens the understanding of religion as a lived practice, rather than merely a system of doctrine. Nevertheless, this approach requires further development that takes into account an intersectional perspective and local context, so that it may become more relevant to the study of religion globally, including in Indonesia.

References

- Ammerman, N. T. (2013). *Sacred stories, spiritual tribes: Finding religion in everyday life*. Oxford University Press.
- Asad, T. (1993). *Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination*. Stanford University Press.
- Bruinessen, M. van. (1995). *Kitab kuning, pesantren, dan tarekat: Tradisi-tradisi Islam di Indonesia*. Mizan.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Csordas, T. J. (1990). Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology. *Ethos*, 18(1), 5–47.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.
- Durkheim, É. (1995). *The elementary forms of religious life*. Free Press. (Original work published 1912)
- Geertz, C. (1960). *The religion of Java*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Harvard University Press.
- Hefner, R. W. (1997). *Islam in an era of nation-states: Politics and religious renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kleinman, A. (1988). *The illness narratives: Suffering, healing, and the human condition*. Basic Books.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.
- McGuire, M. B. (2008). *Lived religion: Faith and practice in everyday life*. Oxford University Press.
- Mernissi, F. (1991). *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam*. Addison-Wesley.
- Morgan, D. (2010). *Religion and material culture: The matter of belief*. Routledge.
- Oakley, A. (1972). *Sex, gender and society*. Temple Smith.
- Orsi, R. A. (1997). Everyday religion and the contemporary world. In D. D. Hall (Ed.), *Lived religion in America: Toward a history of practice* (pp. 3–21). Princeton University Press.
- Scott, J. W. (1986). Gender: A useful category of historical analysis. *The American Historical Review*, 91(5), 1053–1075.
- Turner, B. S. (1991). *Religion and social theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Turner, B. S. (2008). *The body and society: Explorations in social theory* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Woodhead, L. (2002). Gender differences in religious practice. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41(2), 245–260.