

Editorial

Sarojini Nadar¹

What can we learn about the intersections of gender and religion from plays, films, medieval epics, poetry, and ancient biblical texts? A great deal, if the five articles in this issue of the journal are anything to go by. These articles offer in-depth analyses and profound insights about gendered relationships and the ways in which asymmetrical power is manifest in these various forms of media. Drawing on a range of interdisciplinary methods, the articles in this issue invite us to consider how literature, film, poetry, and ancient texts act as a mirror for, and a window to religiously and culturally sanctioned gendered roles, behaviours, and attitudes.

In the first article, *From a Habit to a Husband: Representation of the Intersection between Religion and Masculinities in John Ruganda's Play, The Burdens* (1972), Danson Kahyana analyses the East-African play, "The Burdens" and looks at how the shifting roles of African masculinities are portrayed. Kahyana explores a range of gendered roles in the play through two ostensible archetypes of gender as embodied in the two main characters, "the virgin Mary" – Tinka, the ex-nun – and the "powerful husband" Wamala. The slippages of power that happen in the play, show that in the African popular culture, masculinities are "perpetually on trial."

Keeping with the idea of shifting and unstable gender roles, Elizabeth Olayiwola in her article, *Migration and the Feminization of Power: A Reading of Mike Bamiloye's Transnational Films*, explores how gendered relationships in marriage are framed in three Nollywood films, *The Return* (2014), *The Prodigal Ones* (2008), and *The Finest Wine* (2013). Filtering her analysis through Roberto Marinucci's theory of the feminisation of power, she shows how in these films, women become visible as economically empowered. Yet she laments that, despite the filmmaker's

¹ Sarojini Nadar (PhD) is the Editor in Chief of the African Journal of Gender and Religion. She is a full professor at the University of the Western Cape, where she also holds the Desmond Tutu Research Chair in Religion and Social Justice.

willingness to “visibilise” the economically empowered women, he is at pains to keep women in their biblically sanctioned role of submissiveness in the home.

While women in the Nollywood films are given visibility in the previous article, Luis Josué Salés argues in *To Kill a Matriarchy: Makëdda, Queen of Ethiopia and Specters of Pauline Androprimacy in the Këbrä Nägäšt*, that a major concern of the central section of this epic is “to erode the right to rule of women.” Through a careful reading of the legendary figure of Makëdda through Pauline “androprimacy,” Salés shows how female power is neutralised. Salés concludes that “when scholarship does not replicate the androcentric and androprimal structures that already guide the Këbrä Nägäšt...new vantage points become possible, which in turn facilitate a more nuanced engagement with the text’s cultural and social fabric that questions patriarchal discourse and the narrative structures deployed to legitimate it by female erasure.”

Following on from the focus on Pauline influences, Gertrud Tönsing, in her article, *Victims of Compromise: Women and the Household Codes – Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:21-33*, makes a convincing case that women’s leadership may have been sacrificed on the altar of early Christian unity. The Pauline “household codes” which seemingly prescribe submissive roles for women within the household, she argues, can be seen as a necessary compromise at the time, since the status of women in the early Christian church was contested. Therefore, Tönsing concludes, the codes should not be read “as static prescriptions for today, but as a dynamic mirror on early Christian conflicts.”

The final article in this issue moves us from biblical text to personal narrative and poetic metaphor. Nicole Dickson, in the article, *The Midwife: A Narrative, Feminist Metaphor for Pastoral and Self-Care during Covid-19*, explores the metaphor of midwifery “as a statement of position for supporting pastoral and self-care during Covid-19 times.” Dickson argues that the metaphor of midwifery and specifically the imagery and discourse associated with it such as “expectancy,” “labour pains,” and “birth,” prove useful for making meaning of “Covid-19 (also called a pandemic) stories – stories of living in lockdown, of illness, of loss and grief, and of living in liminal spaces.” We are invited through this essay to consider the poetic power of a feminist metaphor in making meaning of religion during times of liminality, loss, and uncertainty.