

Editorial: Inclusion, Intervention, and Intersectionality

Sarojini Nadar

Editor

This issue of the African Journal of Gender and Religion emerges at a time when the intersections of systemic violence, global inequities, and the climate crisis call for rigorous scholarly engagement. The recent conviction of 50 men in France for the Mazan mass rape case, which involved the prolonged and systemic abuse of Gisèle Pelicot, highlights the entrenched nature of gender-based violence and the global structures of impunity that protect perpetrators. Such violence is not isolated but operates within broader systems: legislative attacks on LGBTQ+ rights in Uganda and Ghana exemplify the confluence of state power and religious rhetoric in policing bodies and identities, while debates at COP29 on climate justice reveal the deeply interconnected exploitation of the earth and marginalized communities.

These contexts underscore the need for intersectional feminist analysis that interrogates the role of religion in both sustaining and challenging these injustices. The contributions in this issue critically examine the intersections of gender, religion, and power, offering nuanced perspectives on the systemic nature of violence and exclusion as well as possibilities for justice.

Fatima Essop's **Advancing Gender Equality in Muslim Leadership: Women's Representation in Ulama Bodies in Post-Apartheid South Africa**, offers an analysis of gendered exclusions within Muslim leadership in South Africa and provides a compelling starting point for this discussion. Her critique examines how patriarchal structures within religious institutions persist, even as women increasingly access theological education. Focusing on ulama bodies, Essop illustrates how decision-making in areas such as family law and governance remains predominantly controlled by men. By highlighting the structural mechanisms that marginalize women, her work invites a broader interrogation of the ways religious authority is constructed and maintained. The analysis emphasizes the importance of

gender-inclusive leadership as a foundational step toward greater equity within religious communities.

The theme of domination and exclusion continues with Mary Hearn-Ayodele, Glencie Rhedrick, and Burdette Lowe's collaborative exploration of ecofeminism and womanist theology in their article: **The Domination of Mother Earth, Gender-Based Violence, and the (Dis)Ease of Eve**. Drawing on intersectional theological critiques of patriarchal readings of Genesis, the authors demonstrate how the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the earth are deeply intertwined. Their analysis aligns with the understanding that climate change, emerging from, and perpetuating systemic injustice, intensifies the precarity faced by already marginalized groups, especially women of colour. They argue that addressing ecological and gendered violence requires not only a critique of theological justifications for domination, but also an active reimagining of relationships grounded in equity and care. By grounding their analysis in the lived realities of those disproportionately impacted by climate injustice, their work emphasises the necessity for intersectional feminist scholarship to engage with both the personal and the systemic.

Evelyn Parker brings this systemic analysis to bear on the deeply intimate realm of intimate partner violence (IPV), in her article: **When Race, Rape, and Religion Collide: A Case Study of IPV, IPA, and Femicide Intervention during the COVID-19 Pandemic**. Situating her study within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on Black women in the United States, Parker highlights the compounded vulnerabilities these women face, exacerbated by systemic racism, economic precarity, and institutional blind spots. By centring the role of chaplains at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Parker illuminates how faith leaders can intervene in both the spiritual and structural dimensions of IPV. Her analysis challenges faith communities to move beyond mere recognition of harm to actively confront the structures that sustain violence.

Building on Parker's focus on faith communities as sites of intervention, Elisabet le Roux and Selina Palm turn to the transformative possibilities of participatory research in addressing systemic violence, in their article: **Feminist Research into Gendered Violence: Developing PhotoVOICE 2.0 in Zambia as a Participatory Arts-based Research Method**. Their study, centered on the Anglican Mothers' Union in Zambia, employs arts-

based methods such as PhotoVOICE 2.0 to amplify the voices of women marginalized within dominant religious and social discourses. By utilizing storytelling and visual expression, this approach not only foregrounds the lived experiences of these women but also challenges the invisibility and erasure that perpetuate harm. Le Roux and Palm's work exemplifies feminist praxis grounded in collaboration and action, demonstrating how participatory methodologies can create spaces for resistance, reclamation, and justice within faith communities.

The final contribution to this issue is Thandi Gamedze's review of Megan Robertson's *Called and Queer*, an ethnographic study of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). Gamedze offers a thoughtful engagement with Robertson's exploration of the contradictions queer clergy face, navigating affirmation and exclusion within the structures of the church. She highlights the depth of Robertson's analysis, particularly its attention to the lived realities of queer clergy and its contribution to ongoing conversations in queer theology. We are particularly proud of this work, given Robertson's role as our managing editor, and we recognize the importance of her research in light of increasing legislative assaults on LGBTQ+ rights in various contexts around the world such as in the USA, Uganda and Ghana.

As this issue reflects on the violence and exclusions that have shaped the past year, it also highlights the critical role of feminist scholarship in envisioning pathways toward justice. From critiques of patriarchal religious authority to explorations of ecological violence and the power of participatory methods, the contributions in this issue affirm the transformative potential of feminist thought and action. Together, they remind us that justice is not merely a theoretical ideal but a lived practice—one that demands confronting the structures that enable harm, amplifying marginalized voices, and imagining a world rooted in equity and care. The AJGR is proud to stand alongside the scholars, activists, and practitioners contributing to this work.