AFRICAN JOURNAL OF GENDER AND RELIGION

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EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT

The *African Journal of Gender and Religion* (AJGR) is a semi-annual publication, moved in 2017 from the Gender and Religion programme at UKZN (the Centre for Deconstructive Theology at UKZN) to the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice at the University of the Western Cape.

Since 2004, the Journal has published research papers, which are relevant to gender, religion, and theology in Africa. The editorial committee considers for publication submissions of a scholarly standard from any of the social science and theological disciplines or related fields of inquiry, which provide useful perspectives at the inter-sections of gender, religion, and theology in Africa. Particular areas of interest include the gendered analysis of religion; theology and the study of religion; innovations in contextual theological education; theological and ethical reflection on social trans-formation; the significance of new religious movements and African-initiated forms of religion; the role of women in religion and society; interfaith dialogue; peace-making and reconciliation; normative and non-normative sexualities, and queer politics.

The *African Journal of Gender and Religion* seeks to promote dialogue and response, not only within the academic community in Africa and beyond, but also with faith prac-titioners working "on the ground" to build a more just society in the region. These may include religious leaders, clergy, other religious officials, professionals, and laity across broad social spectrums who seek to read their faith against the critical issues confronting society today.

Written submissions to the *African Journal of Gender and Religion* may take the form of researched scholarly articles or essays. Book reviews, brief responses to articles, conference reports and summaries of research projects are also welcome. Articles submitted for the section called "praxis" must show evidence of how sound theoretical reflections are brought to bear on practical action. Within the section on "praxis" we will publish essays that are not considered "mainstream academic" but nonetheless point to theories of gender justice in action. Submissions are evaluated through an editorial committee screening process. Further, the articles are also sent for peer review to a minimum of two competent scholars working in a similar field of interest. Prospective contributors of scholarly articles should send a typed copy of their article via e-mail to the submissions editor at submissions@ajgr.org. All submissions must strictly follow the guidelines set out in the *AJGR Style Sheet*. Any article that does not conform to the *Style Sheet* will be returned and will not be considered until the style requirements are adhered to. Published contributors will receive one complimentary copy of the issue in which their work is published. Opinions expressed by contributors are solely their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial committee or the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice at the University of the Western Cape.

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Introduction: Religion and Gender in the Media Marketplace[1]

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ABSTRACT
Against the background of the decolonial turn in scholarship, we reflect on the implications of the exclusion of Africa and Africans from the epistemological labour involved in the development of the field of religion and media. In reviewing recent developments in the field of religion and media studies in Africa, we reveal the research dearth produced by the scarcity of studies in religion and media in Africa, which focuses on the interplays and overlaps between religion, media, and gender. This introduction illustrates the possibility that gender perspectives, approaches, and theorising might contribute to the advancement of the field of religion and media in Africa and examines the possibilities that are generated by the seven contributions featured in this volume. In recognising the discursive, material, and contextual nature of knowledge production, we understand how, through explorations in the religion-media marketplace, the limitations of traditional notions of the *field* and the *archive* are challenged.

KEYWORDS
religion and media; gender; African; religious pluralism; media marketplaces

Africa in Religion and Media Scholarship

The politics of knowledge production and circulation in the academy determined that the *mainstream* corpus of religion and media research has been dominated by theoretical schools located in North America, Northern Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom.[2] Notwithstanding the identity politics which can be gleaned from the asymmetry generated by this arrangement, the development of the field reflects the history of the humanities and reveals a wielding of positional power and privilege which has, to a large extent, contributed to the exclusion of Africa and Africans from the epistemological labour of the field. The problematic of this arrangement, however, does not undermine the important and excellent work that has arisen from the very intellectual silos that it has produced.

Since the mid-2000's, a small yet influential and growing body of scholarship, dedicated to the study of religion and media in Africa, has emerged. The 2006 volume, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, edited by Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors[3] focused on the religious and socio-cultural consequences of media policy, politics, and practices. A third of the contributions explored the religion and media nexus in Africa and were featured alongside contributions from the Middle East, India, and Australia. In 2015, scholars of religion, Rosalind Hackett and anthropologist Benjamin Soares, in their publication *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*[4] brought together insights generated by the first ever continent-wide conference on religion and media in Africa, held in Nigeria in 2008. This volume offers rich and nuanced historical, empirical, methodological, and theoretical reflections on the multiple entanglements of religion, media, culture, and politics on the continent.

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[2]   Stewart M. Hoover and Lundby Knut, *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997); Stewart M. Hoover, Jolyon P. Mitchell and David Morgan, *Religion, Media and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006); David Morgan, "Mediation or Mediatisation: The History of Media in the Study of Religion," *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 12, no.2 (2011): 137-52; Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change," *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 12, no.2 (2011): 119-36; Mia Lövheim, *Media, Religion, and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[3]   Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (eds.), *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

[4]   Rosalind I.J. Hackett and Benjamin F. Soares, *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

In 2018, Felicitas Becker, Joel Cabrita, and Marie Rodet produced a collection of essays entitled, *Religion, Media and Marginality in Africa*.[5] By expanding the notion of media beyond limited conceptions of electronic or digital, this collection examined so-called new and old media side by side, in order to avoid ascribing a technologically-determined emphasis or reinforcing an empirically unfounded and unhelpful "evolutionary distinction" between media technologies.[6] The editorial approach of *Religion, Media and Marginality in Africa* advocates a forward-thinking generative transdisciplinarity which contributes to the expansion of the field of religion and media beyond the limitations that technology-focused considerations might impose.

By contrast, the edited volume, *New Media and Mediatisation of Religion: An African Perspectiv*e, also published in 2018 under the editorship of Gabrial Faimau and William Lesitoakana[7] begins by addressing the dearth in scholarship on new media technology and religion in Africa. The editors opted to isolate new media, both social and digital, as the area of focus. As a result, the publication explores the possibilities that a narrower and focused reading of religion and technology might bring for the development and expansion of the field. Furthermore, Faimau and Lesitaokana predict that the increasing ubiquity and accessibility of social and digital media represent the beginning of a third wave of media scholarship in Africa.

These collections with their foci on African media localities and practices are indeed signs of promise and are testimony to the growth and potential of the field. They are valuable for their reflections on the intersections of religion and media, the rich and varied empirical and ethnographical insights they contribute to the production of new knowledge about religion and religiosity on the continent, for the questions they raise, and for what they tell us about the ways in which the production of meaning is engineered and negotiated through multifarious processes and practices of mediation and mediatisation. Overall, the study of religion *through* the media has opened the field, not only to new sites of research but also to novel topics, subjects, theories, and methods. The work produced on religion and media in Africa, some of

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[5]   Felicitas Becker, Joel Cabrita and Marie Rodet (eds.), *Religion, Media, and Marginality in Modern Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018).

[6]   Becker *et al. Religion, Media, and Marginality in Modern Africa*, 5.

[7]   Gabrial Faimau and William O. Lesitoakana (eds.), *New Media and the Mediatisation of Religion: An African Perspective* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).

which is showcased in this issue, can therefore be regarded as constituting a direct contestation of the aforementioned asymmetry that has characterised the general development of the field.

Religion in African Media Studies on Gender

The politics of knowledge production has been earnestly taken up by the decolonial turn in scholarship. The meaning of this juncture in the history of the academy is particularly significant for its implications for the production of new knowledge about religion. Media forms and practices, with the complexities of their technology and the capricious particularity of their modalities of production and circulation as a site of knowledge about religion, challenge traditional methods of inquiry, and confront limited notions of the nature of *the archive* and *the field*.

The work of African media scholars demonstrates a critical and, in many cases, a social justice commitment to interrogating gender's entanglement with the media. Much of this work is concerned with the ways in which media content both supports and contests gender norms, especially these kinds that deny the full humanity of those who do not uphold the *status quo*.[8] Collectively, African scholars have produced a distinct oeuvre of media and gender scholarship which offers insightful discursive and material analyses that engage the ever-expanding archive of media content that is produced and circulated via television programming, feature and documentary films, news media, print, social, and digital media. By engaging these sites, scholars have described and theorised the representation of women in and through various media productions, examined the reproduction of patriarchal gender tropes through media material, and explored the politics of inclusion and exclusion that accompany either the absence or presence of women in the media. These contributions to the disciplines of African media studies include explorations of topics that have focused on female characters on television programmes, films, news and cartoons, depictions of sexual harassment in films, as well as reflections on the challenges faced by women as media practitioners and owners.[9]

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[8]   Ngonidzashe Muwonwa, "Gendered Narratives and Identities of Nationhood in Documentaries on Zimbabwe Television (ZTV) between 2000 and 2009," *African Communication Research* 4, no.3 (2011): 449-68; Duncan Omanga, "The Wanjiku Metonymy: Challenging Gender Stereotypes in Kenya's Editorial Cartoons," *African Communication Research* 4, no.3 (2011): 411-32.

[9]   Cf. e.g. Audrey Gadzekpo, "Review Article: Battling Old Ghosts in Gender and African Media Research," *African Communication Research* 4, no.3 (2011): 389-410; Audrey

Notwithstanding recent developments in the field of gender and media research, religion is mostly and unfortunately treated as though it is a marginal issue. This does not imply that African media scholars working in the area of gender and media have not addressed the issue of religion in their work. However, it is the marginality afforded to the topic of religion which constitutes an analytical blind spot that might be remedied by more transdisciplinary engagement. Hackett and Soares, in under-scoring "the importance of studying the media when studying religion in Africa"[10] and the importance of studying religion when studying the media in Africa, suggest that the study of media development has largely ignored religion and has instead been preoccupied with questions of development and democracy. Research has shown that in many African countries, the democratisation of the media is intimately entwined with constitutional commitments to religious freedom and political promises of greater plurality and inclusion.[11] Furthermore, the neglect of religion in the study of gender and media in Africa can be regarded as a conse-quence of the ever pervasive yet empirically weak secularisation thesis and has resulted in a failure to acknowledge the powerful material and intersectional ways in which religion is involved in the configuration of people's material realities and bodily experiences.

Certainly, we are not advocating for an "add" religion, Africa, or gender and "stir approach" – this is about a genuine intersectional, decolonial method for the study of religion, media, and gender. By nuancing the

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Gadzekpo, "She Made Me Do It! Discursive Frames and Representations of Spousal Murders in The Ghanaian Press," in *The Architecture for Violence Against Women in Ghana,* eds. Kathy Cusack and Takyiwaa Manuh (Accra: Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre), 265-85; Audrey Gadzekpo, "Missing Links: African Media Studies and Feminist Concerns," *Journal of African Media Studies* 1 (2008): 69-80; Audrey Gadzekpo, "The Hidden History of Women in Ghanaian Print Culture," in *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, ed. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (London: Palgrave Mac-millan, 2005); Colleen, L. Morna and Pauliina Shilongo, "Mainstreaming Gender into Media Education," *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 25 (2004): 133-7; Colleen, L. Morna and Sikhonzile Ndlovu, *Gender and Tabloids in Southern Africa: Mirror on the Media* (Johannesburg: Genderlinks, 2008).

10 Hackett and Soares, *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*.
11 Lee-Shae S. Scharnick-Udemans, "A Historical and Critical Overview of Religion and History in Public Broadcasting in South Africa," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 30, no.2 (2017): 257-80; Azonzeh Ukah, "Managing Miracles: Law, Authority, and the Regulation of Religious Broadcasting in Nigeria," in *New Media and Religious Trans-formations in Africa*, eds. Rosalind I.J. Hackett and Benjamin F. Soares (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Hackett and Soares, *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*.

notion of decoloniality to deliberately include an intersectional analytical lens, we are able to clearly discern the neglect of gender as an area of focus in the study of religion and media**,** and of religion in the study of media and gender. This reproduction of the separatist approach which has separated African issues from the rest of the world, has also, to a large extent, isolated gender and religion from the mainstream corpus of their respective disciplines and discouraged the kind of transdisciplinary work for which we are advocating. We assert that more extended collections of research such as this issue may begin to address this hiatus. It is therefore critical that, in this particular historical moment, a deliberate and sustained effort is made to include gender as a category of core analytical consideration in the study of religion and media in Africa.

Religion and Gender in the Media Marketplace

One of the leading scholars of religion in Africa, Azonzeh Ukah[12] refers to Nigeria as one of the most "vibrant marketplaces for religion and media." We hereby propose a dual understanding of the term "religion-media marketplace." First, the term "religion-media," instead of the "religious media" formulation, is employed in order to show that the breadth of this discussion expands beyond the scope of media, which is owned and operated by religious institutions. Second, following Ukah and in light of the multiple dynamics of deregulation, diversification and subsequent reregulation of media across the continent, we suggest the term "religion-media marketplace" as an idiom for describing the complex political economies within which religion, gender, and media interact. We propose that the particularities of African contexts determine an approach to media, religion, and gender of religion that is conscious of the ways that religion and media have both been reconfigured by the specificities of local contexts. These incorporate an engagement with political processes, including the democratisation and re-regulation of the media as well as socio-cultural transformations of religion that have occurred for a number of reasons, including democratic interventions, migrations, and socio-political unrest.[13]

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[12]   Ukah, *Managing Miracles*.
[13]   Rosalind I.J. Hackett, "Devil Bustin' Satellites: How Media Liberalization in Africa Generates Religious Intolerance and Conflict" in *Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in Neoliberal Africa*, eds. James H. Smith and Rosalind I.J. Hackett (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 153-208.

The contributions in this volume allow us to suggest that the afore-mentioned comment by Ukah may be extended to the rest of the continent. Geographically this issue represents explorations which are materially grounded in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Kenya, while additional contributions are located across time and space in digital worlds that are inhabited by Egyptian and Nigerian communities. The authors demonstrate the kinds of diverse data, topics, and analyses that can be generated from searching for gender in the religion-media marketplace. In the expanse of the religion-media marketplace, the authors have uncovered pressing questions and issues entangled with gender in discourses, narratives, and rhetoric, found on the bodies of individuals, the sounds of voices, the cultures of algorithms, the politics of elections, the reproduction of space, the immediacy of memes, and the manufacture of caricatures. Furthermore, the authors have shown that these representations and expressions of religion, religions, and religious diversity found in the religion-media marketplace are intricately interwoven with broader questions both in the academy and the world. These include issues related to the contestation of gendered religious authority, the politics of piety and belonging, the religionisation of politics, the economic imperatives of the commercial media, the transformation of theologies across time and space, and the reproduction of colonial gender tropes through seemingly banal iterations of religion.

Finally, the contributions in this issue attempt to contest the dominance of the Pentecostal Charismatic bias in the African religion-media marketplace. Half of the contributions focus on Islam, one is focused on a general reading of colonial Christian morality, and two are directly addressing what Pype calls, "Pentecostal-Charismatic Popular Culture."[14] Although the numerical and social dominance of these traditions are clear, the religious diversity of Africa extends well beyond Christianity and Islam. Unfortunately, the paucity of religion and media studies which focus on the other traditions which colour the religious landscape of the continent, warrant more attention than we are able to provide in this introduction. However, we suggest that the same kinds of decolonial intersectional approaches which raise gender as a critical concept in the study of religion and media in Africa may yield more nuanced and representative meanings and approaches to the concept of religion.

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[14]   Katrien Pype, "The Liveliness of Pentecostal-Charismatic Popular Culture in Africa," in *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Post-colonial Societies*, ed. Martin Lindhardt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 345-378.

In the first contribution, "Broadcasting Female Muslim Preaching in Kenya: Negotiating Religious Authority and the Ambiguous Role of the Voice," Hassan Ndzovu discusses the complicated and controversial presence of female Islamic preachers on radio stations in Kenya and how this media presence destabilises traditional notions of religious authority. In this exploration, Ndzovu shows how, through the mediums of radio and voice, critical issues about the role of women in society are raised and engaged. He demonstrates how the tensions raised by the voices of female Islamic preachers are managed by the very presence of these preachers, since their "reading of Islamic doctrine does not differ from that of traditional Muslim clerics." Ndzovu contests the impression that the presence of female Islamic preachers is necessarily indicative of a more progressive interpretation of the role of women in society. He reveals how each element of the female preacher's airtime is regulated in order to complement and reinforce patriarchal readings of Islamic religious texts which structure Muslim societies in Kenya. Ndzovu's argument not only provides insight into mediated tensions between theologies and technologies but also comments on the changing character of Islam in Kenya in the wake of shifting religious-political alliances.

Similar to how religious beliefs and rituals produce sacralised temporality, media technology has facilitated the production of communities that are unbounded by traditional notions of time and space. In the article "Gender Bargains in a Pentecostal (Born-Again) Marriage: Divorce as a Socio-religious Discourse in the Glorious Vessels International Chat Group," Peter Oderinde invites readers to explore online lived Pentecostalism though the instant messaging service, WhatsApp. This group is the online community of a Nigerian-led Pentecostal church, Glorious Vessels International based in Zurich, Switzerland, that regards this digital media platform as a dual opportunity to build an online church and to supplement its local ministry. From a rich data set, Oderinde focuses on the ways in which the Pentecostal couple is constructed against the background of the theological understandings of gender roles, economic status and previous relationships. As a researcher operating in the intimacy and complicated anonymity of a mobile chat group, Oderinde explores the discourses and rhetoric produced through the "reterritorialisation of non-spatial environments" and reveals the ways in which biblical patriarchy informs discourses around the roles and rights of born-again Christian women.

Drawing on the mediatisation of religion theory, Nelly Mwale, in her article, "The Nature and Significance of a Muslim Woman's Contest for Mayor of Lusaka, Zambia," argues that, during the mentioned mayoral campaign, the media acted as a conduit for relaying messages on Islam. In this article she traces the potential and limitations of the ever-popular mediatisation theory in the Zambian context. In doing so, she highlights how popular iterations of this theory over-emphasise the socio-cultural processes that place media in a position of power over religion, while occluding the politics that play a critical role in regulating the ways in which religion, gender, and media interact and operate within the public milieu. Set against the background of the nominally Christian status of Zambia by focusing on the gendered and religious messages which were propagated by Sirre Muntanga, her opponents, and the media, Mwale demonstrates how the media were used to clarify Islamic religious ideas on Muslim women's participation in politics.

Anthropologists Katrien Pype and Alessandro Jedlowski, in surveying "Anthropological Approaches to Media in Africa," include a brief yet erudite reflection on religion and the media in Africa. According to Pype and Jedlowski, new media in particular have opened novel avenues for exploring the production of both religion and religious belief and practice through "the emergence of new mass-mediated moral regimes."[15] Sokfa John's article, "Computing Cupid: Online Dating and the Faith of Romantic Algorithms," foregrounds the power and expanse of the algorithm, a "quiet and opaque object employed to process and turn into capital the massive data that are continually generated from our digital life and practice." John explores how, using conservative theologies and algorithms, religious dating sites reinforce religiously sanctioned heteronormativity and illustrates the way in which Christian morality is implicated with technological processes. He shows how these media sites are sacralised as mediators and facilitators of holy plans for romantic relationships. As one of a handful of empirical studies of social and digital media in South Africa which employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches, John's study is particularly valuable for its fresh methodological insights.

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[15] Katrien Pype and Alessandro Jedlowski, "Anthropological Approaches to Media in Africa," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Africa*, eds. Roy R. Grinker, Stephen C. Lubkemann, Christopher B. Steiner and Euclides Gonçalves (Wiley Online, 2019), 360.

Siyabulela Tonono's contribution, "Uyajola 9/9 uTata'kho: Missionaries and Black Masculinities," seeks to highlight the relationship between contemporary depictions of black masculinity featured on direct broadcast satellite service television and nineteenth-century missionary depictions thereof. He engages the content of two programmes, Uyajola 9/9 and UTata'kho, that respectively seek to expose cheating lovers and negligent fathers through the plots of programmes. These programmes explore how black men are caricatured as hypersexual, criminal, and irresponsible. Set against the background of the decolonial theory, Tonono argues that, given the sustained popularity of direct broadcast satellite service television, as well as the pervasive presence and power of colonial Christian tropes in African societies, this older form of media's ability to influence public perceptions of and regard for black men should not be underestimated.

In "Gender, Religion and the Media: An Analysis of Selected Media Representations of Fungisai's Images and Music," Pauline Mateveke uses Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of hybridity as a third space or culture to track and analyse the resistance of a female Zimbabwean gospel artist to the socially acceptable female gospel artist image. She also explores the multiple manifestations of religious power which constrict and regulate women's participation in society in general and the gospel music industry in particular. Through exploring Fungisai's identity expressions on various media platforms, Mateveke argues that Fungisai is able to navigate these systems by adopting a hybrid self which contests religious and gender norms, allowing her to "mock and de-stabilise the systems that attempt to control her."

Cherry Muslim's contribution "Shifting Dynamics of Safe Spaces for Women in Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Egypt: A Reflection on the Article, 'We are not Women, We are Egyptians'," considers how, during intense moments of political unity, gender norms for women were temporarily suspended and then abruptly reinstated. Muslim explores the limitations of "online" activism and its repercussions for "offline" intersections in a heavily censored regime. Drawing on Saba Mahmood's concept of subversive piety, she argues that cyber-feminism is an alternative space wherein women are able to experience limited safety from male violence, while being able to practise the power of political voice.

Conclusion

This volume brings together a collection of articles that address the ways in which gender as lived experience, theoretical framework, and analytical device, is involved in a number of complex relationships with religion and media. However, the utility of gender theories, concepts, research approaches, and methodology, particularly those emerging from the African context, have been under-researched. This volume showcases contributions that critically engage and contest the epistemological and contextual sensibilities of the field of religion and media and offers guidance into the kinds of future research topics and contexts, especially those which nuance understandings of gender and contest dominant heteronormative tropes, which are necessary to further advance the field. It is our hope that this volume will be the first of many to focus on the topic of religion, media, and gender in Africa.

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Broadcasting Female Muslim Preaching in Kenya: Negotiating Religious Authority and the Ambiguous Role of the Voice[1]

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ABSTRACT
Most of the Islamic public sermonising in Kenya is done by male clerics. However, since the liberalisation of the airwaves there is an emerging clique of female preachers (*dai'ya*) engaging in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge through radio stations. The broadcasting of sermons by the radio stations provides the female preachers access to the public, facilitating their participation in the ethical discussion of various issues from an Islamic perspective. It is argued that this trend destabilises previous qualifications of religious authority. Therefore, this study analyses how the radio stations facilitate the ways in which Islam is presented to the public. Significantly, it explores the controversial status of the female voice as a medium of transmitting religious knowledge to the Muslim public, since *ulama* emphasise the importance of the voice as a mode of transmitting authoritative religious knowledge. In this respect, the study further asks, What is the role of the female voice as a means of expression of authoritative public speech?

KEYWORDS
Islam; female preachers; sermons; radio; media; Kenya

Introduction

The democratisation of the political space in the early 1990s was the turning point of the Kenyan Muslims as a community seeking political recognition and public prominence. Constitutional reforms together with the removal of the government monopoly of the media landscape expedited the launch of Muslim radio stations in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Garissa. This facilitated the conveying of live sermons and recorded radio lectures, and triggering debates on moral issues in the Muslim public. Most of the Islamic public sermonising in Kenya has historically been done by male clerics, but recently there is an emerging clique of female preachers engaging in this form of public participation on the

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radio stations. Undoubtedly, the broadcasting of sermons, exhortations, and lectures (*mawaidha*) by the radio stations provides the female preachers access to the wider public, thereby enabling their participation in the ethical discussion of various social issues from an Islamic perspective. This trend destabilises previous qualifications of religious authority.[2]

Numerous studies on women's religious authority have been conducted in different Muslim societies. A recent study, closely related to the present study, is done by Frederick Madore and Muriel Gomez-Perez, on how "visibility and legitimacy" are being constructed by Muslim women in Burkina Faso. Their study presents young educated Burkinabe Muslim women who capitalise on the opportunities provided by the new technologies and the growth of Islamic media to increase their public profile and religious legitimacy. Although Burkinabe men have an exclusive privilege on the public discussion of religious matters in the Islamic media, this new technology is now enabling certain women to venture into this public space.[3]

The role of the media *vis-à-vis* religious authority is also explored by Dorothea Schulz, arguing that, due to the Malian state wielding control over the authorisation of preachers to perform on national media, and also owing to the competition generated by the explosion of local radio stations, the radio preachers' views of Muslim religiosity have resulted in a contested sphere. Consequently, the media landscape has turned into an arena characterised by a contentious public discussion between "Muslim intellectuals" and "freelance preachers" with different "levels of religious erudition and oratorical skills."[4] This growing involvement with mass-mediated Islam should not, however, be seen as weakening the Muslims' religious conviction, but rather widening "the spectrum of forms of religious engagement and sociability."[5]

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[2]   Dorothea Schulz, "Evoking Moral Community, Fragmenting Muslim Discourse: Sermon Audio-Recordings and the Reconfiguration of Public Debate in Mali," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 27 (2007): 48.

[3]   Frederick Madore and Muriel Gomez-Perez, "Muslim Women in Burkina Faso since the 1970s: Toward Recognition as Figures of Religious Authority?" *Islamic Africa* 7. No.2 (2016): 185-209.

[4]   Dorothea Schulz, "Promises of (Im)mediate Salvation: Islam, Broadcast Media, and the Remaking of Religious Experience in Mali," *American Ethnologist* 33, no.2 (2006): 215.

[5]   Schulz, "Promises of (Im)mediate Salvation," 222.

Though there have been conscious efforts by respective Muslim societies to educate women with the intention of improving their religious knowledge,[6] women continue to have difficulties in legitimating their Islamic knowledge.[7] In overcoming the challenges posed to women's religious authority, deliberate steps by the state to feminise the religious discourse are evident in Morocco and Turkey. Meriem El Haitami highlights the Moroccan state's endeavours to train female religious scholars as *murshidat*, who are equipped with preaching and public speaking skills to counsel women in religious practices and social life. Their increased participation in the government's training programme demonstrates how these women construct their authority as religious leaders in the midst of challenges posed by male religious authorities.[8] As in Morocco, Mona Hassan argues that in Turkey, the "state-sponsored female preachers are disrupting Turkish socio-cultural assumptions of the male voices as the exclusive voice of official religious authority."[9]

The democratisation process witnessed in Kenya in the 1990s affected Muslim women in different ways. First, due to the liberalisation of the media tools from state control, it allowed their accessibility to different sections of the population. As a result of the liberal political environment, numerous local FM radio stations were allowed to operate, including those inclined on religious orientation. Second, the process of democratisation promoted a pluralism that embraced female articulations of religious doctrines and texts.[10] Whether espoused in a Salafi-Wahabi or Sufi framework,[11] the emerging group of female preachers is using their advanced religious knowledge to deliver sermons through the radio stations.

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6   Elisha Renne, "Educating Muslim Women and the Izala Movement in Zaria City, Nigeria," *Islamic Africa* 3, no.1 (2012): 55-86.
7   Amber Gemmeke, "Marabout Women in Dakar: Creating Authority in Islamic Knowledge," *Journal of the International African Institute* 79, no.1 (2009): 128-47.
8   Meriem El Haitami, "Restructuring Female Religious Authority: State-Sponsored Women Religious Guides (*Murshidat*) and Scholars (*'Alimat*) in Contemporary Morocco," *Mediterranean Studies* 20, no.2 (2012): 227-40.
9   Mona Hassan, "Women Preaching for the Secular State: Official Female Preachers (*Bayan Vaizler*) in Contemporary Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no.3 (2011): 451.
10 Ousseina Alidou, *Muslim Women in Postcolonial Kenya: Leadership, Representation and Social Change* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 146.
11 Salafi-Wahabi is a puritanical Islamic reforming group promoting a rigid and supposedly correct interpretation of Islamic texts. On the other hand, Sufism is a mystical Islamic belief and practice known for incorporating folk practices, viewed by orthodox Muslims as being un-Islamic.

Though men have held a near-monopoly over the public religious leadership for much of Islamic history, this tendency is changing with Muslim women being allowed to take an active role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge (*ilm*) in different parts of the world.[12] Muslim women are now publicly speaking for Islam as preachers, teachers, and inter-preters of religious texts on various platforms. In complementing other existing studies on women's active involvement as authorities in Islamic knowledge, this article answers the question, How have the Muslim radio stations in Kenya facilitated and influenced the ways in which Islam is presented in the public? It is observed that since the establishing of Muslim radio stations in Kenya, they have provided opportunities to a diversity of interpreters of Islam interested in communicating religious knowledge to the Muslim communities. In particular, the article explores the role that the stations have played in the creation of female religious authority.

In this article, religious authority is primarily associated with roles that demand the mastery of Islamic knowledge (Qur'an and Hadith) i.e. teaching, preaching, interpreting texts, leading prayers, and providing guidance on religious matters. In other words, religious authority is here viewed as the ability of a knowledgeable person (both male and female) to influence others, irrespective of their gender "through performing and teaching exemplary knowledge and piety."[13] Generally, female religious authority exists and is accepted among the Kenyan Muslim communities, although within certain limitations. Thus, despite their acceptance, female Islamic authority in Kenya, as shown in this article, is restricted by the common traditional gender customs being evident elsewhere in most Muslim societies. In Kenya, female public space is available for "public" worshipping and exhortation, which are strictly governed by gendered public rules of interaction. Thus, the emerging female preachers uphold the conservative gendered social structures expressed by the male *ulama* (scholars on religious matters) in the country. They are reluctant to challenge the existing system for fear of losing the preaching platforms availed to them at the Muslim radio stations. Their adherence to the "acceptable" religious and social norms guarantees their partici-pation in the Muslim public sphere.

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[12] Massooda Bano and Hillary Kalmbach (eds.), *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1.

[13] Britta Frede and Joseph Hill, "Introduction: En-gendered Islamic Authority in West Africa," *Islamic Africa* 5, no.2 (2014): 150.

While learned Muslim women in Kenya have also contributed in transmitting Islamic knowledge as Qur'anic schoolteachers,[14] only their male counterparts occupy the public platform to articulate religious thoughts as public preachers delivering *mawaidha* to the communities. Such societal arrangements and attitudes are reinforced by the view that Muslim women, despite their advanced education, are not supposed to speak in public or even to engage in a public disputation of religious matters. However, this notion is being put into question with the appearance of female preachers on radio stations to offer *mawaidha* to the Muslim public. The establishment of the Muslim radio stations has enabled the female preachers to enter the public space that has traditionally been dominated by men. Therefore, this article endeavours to examine the phenomenon of female religious preachers, through an analysis of how the Muslim radio stations have created a structure for their public participation.

The article focuses on the female preachers on the Muslim radio stations, since this space has the potential to enable any Muslim preacher (both male and female) to exert an influence over the religious and social practices of the communities. This is because radio sermons are easily accessible to people lacking strong literacy and religious training and has the potential of being the most attractive religious commodity to consume. Significantly, the article will also explore the controversial status of the female voice as a medium of transmitting religious knowledge to the Muslim public. Muslim *ulama* have emphasised the importance of the voice as mode of transmitting authoritative religious knowledge. In this respect, I am interested in interrogating the role of the female voice as a means of expression and debates over authoritative public speech.

Female Religious Authority in Kenya

A chain of women educators in religious knowledge has already existed amongst the Kenyan Muslim communities. However, notwithstanding their level of Islamic knowledge, their instructional role was restricted to the traditional *chuo* (pl. *vyuo*), which is a simple shelter or a room in someone's house where a small group of children under the supervision of a single teacher are taught to read and memorise the Qur'an.[15] This

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[14] Alidou, *Muslim Women in Postcolonial Kenya*.
[15] Hassan Mwakimako, Hassan Ndzovu, and Justin Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam," Research Report (Nairobi, 2009), 21-2.

development is a reflection of the extent to which Muslim women were denied opportunities to pursue higher Islamic learning beyond the "necessary" basics. Even reputable early Muslim scholars in Kenya, like Sheikh Al-Amin Ali Mazrui (died in 1947) and Sheikh Sayyid Ali Badawi (died in 1963) did not make efforts to recruit and encourage women to advance their knowledge in Islamic education.[16] What could have attributed to this scenario?

Traditionally, the institutions of Islamic authority such as the caliph, the *alim* (scholar), the *mufti* (legal scholar who offers legal opinions), the *kadhi* (judge who delivers binding rulings), the Sufi Sheikh (mystical leaders), and the *khatib* (mosque preacher) have historically been occupied by the male members of the society.[17] Although women were sometimes afforded opportunities to attain significant high levels of learning, they were still excluded from occupying public offices as *muftis* and *kadhis*. The male *ulama* regarded women to be unfit to qualify for these public positions because of their supposed ability to distract the attention of the males in their company.[18] Studies indicate that numerous "Sunni Muslim scholars have associated feminine sexuality" with the potential "to trigger *fitna* (corruption, temptation)" in society.[19] This sexualisation of women's bodies and voices is common in multiple religious traditions as well as in patriarchal societies. Consequently, as shown elsewhere in this article, women try to embrace more husky voices so as not to sound too feminine lest they trigger unholy thoughts and sexual temptations to male audiences.

The *ulama* class, which is generally associated with a scholarly religious authority, was attained after a considerable period of training and proven display of acceptable religious behaviour, "with periodic disputation" before "other male scholars."[20] This process of preparing a scholarly religious authority excluded the women whose presence is controlled in the public spheres. "Even with advanced education there is limited space

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16 Alidou, *Muslim Women in Postcolonial Kenya*, 63.
17 Hilary Kalmbach, "Social and Religious Change in Damascus: One Case of Female Islamic Religious Authority," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no.1 (2008): 37-57; Bano and Kalmbach (eds.), *Women, Leadership and Mosques*, 4.
18 Kalmbach, "Social and Religious Change in Damascus."
19 Britta Frede, "Following in the Steps of Aisha: Hassaniyya-Speaking Tijani Women as Spiritual Guides (*Muqaddamat*) and Teaching Islamic Scholars (*Limrabutat*) in Mauritania," *Islamic Africa* 5, no.2 (2014): 244.
20 Kalmbach, "Social and Religious Change in Damascus," 44.

for women to articulate their knowledge in the public, as they are expected to remain relatively in private," Sele Mzamil Omar Mzamil observed.[21] The fundamental purpose of women accessing religious knowledge is the recognition of their role as "the cornerstone around which the Islamic family is built."[22] Mzamil[23] added that

> the elementary education they acquired was not to prepare them as preachers or imam of a mosque, but was to enable her to appreciate her existence as a Muslim; and to raise her children in a proper way – being the main source of knowledge – as respectful and responsible people who recognize God.

Thus, for a Muslim woman to be able to disseminate the religious knowledge to her children, it is assumed that she should be familiar with the primary texts of the principal sources of Islamic knowledge: the Qur'an and the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad.

This conservative Muslim view of restricting a Muslim woman's religious education to the "necessary" basics, counter the efforts of Mwalim Azara Mudira who in 1987 established the Ma'had boarding school for advanced Islamic theological training for Muslim women in Kenya. Established in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, the mission of the school is "to challenge the exclusionary male-centered tradition of advanced education in Islamic studies and to create an alternative space for authoritative intervention by Muslim women Islamic scholars in the religious realm."[24] Though Muslim women received less incentives to advance their Islamic knowledge because they were not expected to be scholars (*ulama*) of religion,[25] there is a section of female preachers in Kenya who have successfully advanced their religious training through various initiatives. For example, with the support from her family, Bi-Nafisa Khitamy Badawi has emerged as one of the highly respected female religious authorities in Kenya (and maybe the East African region, according to my respondents). It is alleged that the Islamic knowledge that Bi-Nafisa received was intended to "prepare her to be a scholar," given that she descended

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[21] Interview with Sele Mzamil Omar Mzamil, Director of Magic Studios, on 23 December 2013, Mombasa.
[22] Kalmbach, "Social and Religious Change in Damascus," 46.
[23] Interview with Sele Mzamil Omar Mzamil.
[24] Alidou, *Muslim Women in Postcolonial Kenya*, 61.
[25] Michael Lambek, *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery and Spirit Possession* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

from one of the families of leading Muslim scholars in Kenya, Sheikh Sayyid Ali Badawi.[26] Similar sentiments of family support were expressed by her namesake Nafisa Abdurahaman Said who interpreted her advanced attainment of religious knowledge as an indication of a scholar, positing: "I think I am a scholar by default. Since scholarship is in my lineage, I decided to undertake studies later after my marriage. I am here today through the support of my family members." [27]

Clearly, religious learning among these women was due to the support of their relatives, and upon completion, they began to offer religious instruction to other women. Apart from family ties, other learned women have also successfully secured the entitlement of religious authority due to self-training, a pious lifestyle, and devotion to the activities of *da'wah*. This includes women such as Fatma Mohammed (Radio Salaam), Abla Nahida (Radio Salaam), and Ima Hamisi (Radio Rahma). In various parts of Kenya, a few learned women have appeared who have dedicated their efforts to enhance opportunities for other women to access advanced education in Islamic knowledge.[28] Gradually, the emerging category of female religious scholars is attaining recognition in the Kenyan Muslim communities, since they are considered knowledgeable and thereby in a position to "act as an authoritative personality" whenever a chance is availed to them.[29] Due to their advanced education in Islamic knowledge, these women are assigned religious radio programmes available in the country to deliver *mawaidha* and *nasiha* (counselling), all grounded in the Qur'an and Sunna of the Prophet. How these Muslim radio stations that offer the learned Muslim women an opportunity to convey public sermons, operate, is a theme examined in the section below.

Muslim Radio Stations in Mombasa: Response to "Indecency" and "Immorality" in Kenyan Broadcasting Culture

The religious media in Kenya expanded in "the context of political democratization and media liberalization" as evident in other parts of

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26 Interview with Nafisa Abdurahaman Said, 2 January 2014, Darul-Saada, Mombasa.
27 Interview with Nafisa Abdurahaman Said.
28 Alidou, *Muslim Women in Postcolonial Kenya*, 63.
29 Frede and Hill, "Introduction: En-gendered Islamic Authority in West Africa," 152.

Africa in the 1990s.[30] This liberalisation spurred the proliferation of Muslim radio stations, which sprung out of the concern by Muslims that Christian religious programmes occupy more airspace than Islamic lectures broadcast on national radio and television stations. The government-run broadcasting corporation television (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) had around ten regular – recently increased to about 20 – Christian programmes each week, while Muslim viewers have up to the present been allotted only half an hour programme per week, *Ukumbi wa Kiislamu* (the Islamic Forum).

The current liberal political environment has facilitated the rapid growth of local FM radio stations in recent years, thereby offering opportunities for religious broadcasting. By the nature of FM broadcasting in the country, the reach of these religious broadcasters is localised, allowing them to develop a substantial influence in the areas they cover.[31] There are three licensed Muslim radio stations – Iqra, Salaam, and Rahma – compared to several Christian broadcasters in the country, like Baraka FM (interdenominational), Biblia Husema, Family FM (interdenominational), Hope FM (Pentecostal), Imani FM (interdenominational), Sayare FM (interdenominational), and Waumini FM (Catholic). Although there are two radio stations in Garissa town –Star FM and Frontier Radio – that broadcast some Islamic programmes in the local Somali language, these stations have no clear Islamic agenda.[32] It is assumed that through their programmes the Muslim radio stations succeed in disseminating religious knowledge to new converts, non-Muslims, and a wide section of the Muslim population.

Of the three Muslim religious broadcasts, Iqra is the oldest station being established in 1999 by the partnership of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) and some individual Muslims in the country. Its broadcast range is not confined to the Nairobi area, but it has spread to other regions within its Transmission Area of Service to include Arusha in the neighbouring Tanzania. Later, the establishment of Radio Rahma and afterwards Radio Salaam, both in the coastal city of Mombasa, followed this station. Invariably, these radio stations host programmes catering for female preachers, addressing, though not

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[30]   Tilo Gratz, "Christian Religious Radio Production in Benin: The Case of Radio Maranatha," *Social Compass* 6, no.1 (2014): 58.

[31]   Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam," 1-32.

[32]   Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam."

always, women's issues. My focus in this article will be on the two radio stations in coastal Kenya – Radio Rahma and Radio Salaam – which are informed by the fact that the female preachers involved in this study deliver their radio programmes of religious exhortation on them.

Radio Rahma began broadcasting as an Islamic station at the end of 2004, occupying a less outstanding building on the mainland of Mombasa with tiny offices and the basic equipment. However, despite this lower outward appearance, the station is "visible and audible along the coast."[33] The station commenced as a commercial radio station, "under the name Pulse FM, and later decided to turn into an Islamic station in cultural terms to address the issue of 'indecency and immorality'," which is "popular with the broadcasting culture in the country. It was the cultural and religious imperative that gave the initial impetus to the station, and this continues to be an important integral part of its appeal."[34] Currently the station covers the entire coastal region, especially the lower coast from Vanga to Lamu, while in the inland, the station has extended up to Taru, which is far away from the Taita region – the coastal uplands. In their desire to cover the dominantly inhabited Muslim regions of the country, the station secured a frequency to cover the Garissa area, which is situated in the northeastern region of the country and predominantly inhabited by Somali Muslims. To present an image of an international radio, the station has a website that listeners abroad could use to access its programmes through streaming.

On the other hand, Radio Salaam was founded in 2006 and occupies a more extravagant office than its local competitor – Radio Rahma – in a tower building at the centre of Mombasa city.[35] With the enormous investment done by Radio Salaam in procuring the latest equipment including an Out Broadcasting Van (OBV), Radio Rahma seems to be struggling financially. In their self-appraisal, Radio Salaam boasts to be the only station in the region with an OBV, yet asserting that it is barely relying on advertisements to run its activities and remain operational. The station has attracted several sponsors whose needs are catered to by the various packages of advertisement offered: commercial, activation within one hour, classified, and sponsorship. Depending on the adver-tisement package, one can sponsor the *adhan*, Qur'an recitation, and the

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[33]   Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam."
[34]   Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam."
[35]   Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam."

dhikr (devotional acts of worship), among other programmes.[36] Correspondingly, Radio Rahma operates with a budget that directly depends on advertisements as captured in the words of its news editor: "The source of revenue is only advertisement. We do all types of advertisement except the ones [that] go against [the] Islamic law e.g. alcohol, family planning, pork [etc]."[37]

Like any modern company, Radio Salaam engages in corporate social responsibility activities. Some of its corporate responsibility initiatives to society include the distribution of relief food to famine stricken communities facing starvation at the coast; sponsoring football teams (in Garissa and Mombasa) and tournaments in Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa and Kwale; organising children fanfare through their programme, *Jarida la Watoto* (The Children's Magazine); and assisting orphans within the region. More so, the station organises road shows as a way of reaching out to their fans and making the station visible.[38] As a gesture of giving back to the society, Radio Rahma does not have elaborate social responsibility activities, but offers various goodies to orphanages during the month of Ramadan.[39]

Despite these differences, the content of the two Muslim stations seems similar. They both devote a substantial amount of broadcast time to Qur'an recitations, doctrinal matters and programmes where *ulama* give advice on practical matters concerning living as a Muslim. In Radio Rahma, some of the supposedly religious programme broadcasts include *Kikao cha Fiqh* (The Jurisprudence Session), *Visa vya Maswahaba* (Stories of the Companion of the Prophet), *Hadith ya Wiki* (Hadith of the Week), *Wasia wa Ijumaa* (The Friday Counsel), and *Ibada si Ada* (Worship is not Custom).[40] A further ambition of Radio Rahma is the effort to broadcast the Friday worship live from a number of mosques, which mostly comprise of Masjid Junda, Masjid Kilifi, Masjid Qadiriyya, Masjid Konzi, and Masjid Nurein. In similar measure, Radio Salaam has also approached mosques that they alternate in relaying their Friday worship live, including Masjid Rahma, Masjid Luta, Masjid ummul Kulthum, Masjid sheikh Ibrahim, and Masjid Hudaa (all in Mom-

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[36] Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed of Radio Rahma, 16 December 2014, Mombasa.
[37] Interview with Faiz Musa, News Editor, Radio Rahma, 3 January 2014, Mombasa.
[38] Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed, 16 December 2014.
[39] Interview with Faiz Musa.
[40] Interview with Faiz Musa.

basa), and Masjid Landhis and Jamia Masjid (in Nairobi).[41] Though these mosques are not connected to the radio stations, their choices are to a certain extent attributed to a specific doctrinal orientation of the owners of the Muslim radio stations as shown below. Typically, such shows consist of a small production team visiting a mosque and then transmit its Friday worship to the listeners. Regularly, listening to religious programmes and the broadcasted Friday worship give people the feeling that they are "good Muslims" by constantly attuning their ear to listening to God's word. This practice is similar to the one described as "desires for immediacy" by Tilo Gratz.[42]

In addition to the straightforward Islamic broadcasting, the two stations incorporate general news, current affairs and entertainment program-ming, which are presented from an Islamic perspective, but often without any explicit Islamic message. The Islamic broadcasting forms the bedrock of the programmes of the stations, because there is a strong audience response to programmes that offer religious guidance and instruction. The success of Radio Rahma and Radio Salaam is apparent from both their steady expansions in terms of staff and broadcast range and from the growing pool of listeners attracted by the variety of programmes that include religion, news, and entertainment. The listeners expect the two stations to offer news that is relevant and non-biased towards Muslims.[43]

An emphasis on listening and broadcasting the views of audiences as expressed in call-ins or by SMS, has encouraged coastal Muslims to identify with these stations. As a result, the two stations could be described as almost an entirely coastal phenomenon. Though most of their programmes are done in the Swahili language interspersed with English recorded lectures, Radio Salaam also has a substantial broad-casting profile in Somali – the Somali hour. This interest in the Somali language in a predominantly "Swahili zone" is supported by the fact that the station is owned by a powerful Kenyan Somali family and also covers the Garissa region that is mostly inhabited by ethnic Somalis.[44]

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[41] Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed, 16 December 2014.
[42] Gratz, "Christian Religious Radio Production in Benin," 61.
[43] Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam."
[44] Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam."

Even though the Muslim stations do not present their mission as a proselytising one, Islamisation and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge are considered to be paramount. For the invited religious female speakers, the Muslim radio stations become an important tool for transmitting Islamic knowledge. By establishing a reputation as a source of Islamic teachings and values, the two religious radio stations anticipate to attract audiences with shared moral values. However, what is most striking about the two radio stations is that their news coverage and discussions are strongly Kenyan, both in topics and perspectives. For instance, Radio Rahma attempts to offer news and a current affairs coverage that counter the perceived bias of "mainstream media," thereby playing a sort of advocacy role. This is evident in the content of call-ins and SMS contributions from listeners during discussions of current affairs, suggesting a close involvement in the Kenyan political culture and debates. It is common that broadcasts and comments are mostly about current Kenyan issues: the politics of the ruling party and opposition, as well as corruption in government, among others. Both the content of programmes and the listeners' input locate them in a national, Kenyan perspective. This may, of course, be the result of some self-censorship done by the broadcasters and audience, who are inevitably aware that they may be under hostile scrutiny.[45]

Generally, within the public domain there is a strong impression that associates Radio Rahma with the camp of *watu wa maulidi* (the people of maulid),[46] while Radio Salaam is regarded by some Muslims as pushing a particular Salafi agenda. This view is utterly refuted by Faiz Musa of Radio Rahma, claiming that the notion is a creation of the public. Nevertheless, it is possible that this perception is formulated due to the fact that most of the sheikhs invited to Radio Rahma are individuals that are sympathetic with the *watu wa maulidi* camp (people of maulidi), while those going to Radio Salaam are inclined towards Wahabi ideas and teachings. This scenario has been interpreted as merely accidental and not as an official policy of the religious stations.[47]

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[45] Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam."
[46] This refers to the group of Muslims who continues to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (*maulidi*).
[47] Interview with Faiz Musa; Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed of Radio Rahma, 20 December 2013, Mombasa.

Despite the sectarian association of the radio stations by the Muslim public, both broadcasters contend on a non-discrimination approach when inviting religious speakers. Irrespective of their gender, the most important benchmark for a religious speaker to be summoned is to exhibit the ability to address issues without antagonising the Muslim community and displaying wisdom when responding to controversial topics. Though it is a fact that the Muslims at the coast are split into camps – the people of maulidi and the Wahabi – the invited religious speakers at Radio Rahma are expected to be people who have not shown an inclination toward a specific camp in their public dealings. An official of the radio station remarked to me: "We do not invite speakers who are known to belong to a specific camp, because we know they will raise tension and controversy."[48] This view is in line with the station's insistence on a non-discrimination policy that disregards the sectarian leaning of their religious speakers and emphasises their knowledge, which is deemed significant to the community. Perhaps to ensure that their religious programmes meet a certain threshold and that the invited speakers fit the station's mission, Radio Salaam has established an advisory group of male *ulama* to advise on content. This "vetting board" has created some tension between the broadcasters and the *ulama*, as the latter forbids things that the former considers would be popular with audiences.[49]

While Radio Rahma does not have a regulating board to evaluate sermons before they are aired, speakers on the religious programmes have to be endorsed by the station manager who is also an imam and uses his discretion to recommend to the station his colleagues who are fitting the "non-controversial" tag.[50] A similar expression of non-discrimination is echoed by an employee of Radio Salaam, indicating that "we are open to both sides of the divide, but there are topics that we cannot allow, topics that are either confusing to the *ummah*, or will lead to the *ummah* being divided. Therefore, a pro-maulid sheikh cannot talk about maulid, or an anti-maulid sheikh bring a topic at Radio Salaam to attack the maulid. It is the same with Jihad and other sensitive topics."[51] As a result, *ulama* holding different doctrinal positions are invited to the station, upon receiving an endorsement from the vetting board of *ulama*.

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[48]   Interview with Faiz Musa.
[49]   Mwakimako, Ndzovu, and Willis, "Trends in Kenyan Islam."
[50]   Interview with Faiz Musa.
[51]   Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed, 16 December 2013.

Despite the supposed tolerance by the station, Radio Salaam empha-sises that the station is strictly guided by following the practice of Prophet Muhammad and his companions[52] – a view that has traditionally been associated with Salafism. Irrespective of the two radio stations' affiliation, they both provide a forum for female preachers to exercise their religious authority and interact with the larger Muslim community in the public space – a theme explored in the next section.

Public Sermonising of Female Preachers on the Muslim Radio Stations

Religious programmes designated by the Muslim radio stations are important spaces for the performance and transmission of Islamic knowledge. Thus, the radio stations, Radio Rahma and Radio Salaam, provide important forums for female preachers to demonstrate their religious knowledge to Kenya's Muslim public. With both stations, women's broadcasting is primarily intended for female audiences despite the awareness of the existence of male callers whom the stations would wish to be silent during the interactive programmes. Inasmuch as the radio stations desire to segregate their listeners, they would require monitoring capabilities to enable them to detect and implement gender control, a task that is at the moment overwhelming and challenging.[53] At Radio Rahma, only three religious programmes are allocated to the female preachers, namely *Ukumbi wa Wanawake* (The Women's Forum), *Darsa la Wanawake* (The Women's Gathering), and *Wasaa wa Wanawake* (The Women's Space). Of these programmes, only *Ukumbi wa Wanawake* is a live and interactive programme that allows listeners to call or send SMSs.[54] In the case of Radio Salaam, only one interactive programme, *Bustani la Wanawake* (Women's Garden), is allocated for the female preachers.[55]

Generally, radio preachers, irrespective of their gender, are expected to display a certain level of advanced scholarship in religious knowledge. The lectures of the female preachers, broadcast regularly on the two Muslim radio stations in Mombasa, focus on religious instruction and moral advice that do not necessarily address women. Their sermons capture "the eschatological themes of death, judgment and suffering"

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[52] Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed, 16 December 2013.
[53] Interview with Faiz Musa.
[54] Interview with Faiz Musa.
[55] Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed, 16 December 2013.

which are assumed to be significant in inculcating certain ethical Islamic virtues – humility, fear of God, and modesty.[56] There is no doubt that the female preachers have to rely on the Muslim radio stations to publicly articulate their views of proper Muslim conduct and practice to an unrestricted audience. Without the radio stations, the female preachers would have difficulties of extending their audience beyond their respective local women learning circles.

The usage of the radio stations allows a wide accessibility and effective mode of engaging with the Muslim public. In the interactive programmes, listeners are allowed to call the presenters with various questions seeking clarification on a myriad of issues, after which the female preachers deliver their responses live on air. This approach indicates the female preachers' acceptance as authorities, since the people trust them with their questions as they endeavour to be "better" Muslims. The appropriation of the new broadcast medium by some of the female preachers provides them with a platform to add their voices on religious matters within the Muslim public. Capitalising on the opportunities presented by new technologies, a number of women – both young and old – have embarked on disseminating religious knowledge through the Muslim radio stations, which is viewed as a form of *da'wah* to the *ummah*. These women are often respected teachers in the Qur'anic and secular schools, offering instruction in religious matters and Arabic literacy in their respective institutions.[57] As a result of their educational attainment and reputation, their radio sermons are popular among their audiences as demonstrated in their interactive programmes. The careers of these female preachers began as instructors of Muslim women's learning circles in their neighbourhoods, thereby restricting their lessons to these smaller groups. After the group instructors attain recognition as a religious authority, they are often invited by the local Muslim radio stations to extend their teachings to a wider female radio audience.[58]

The increasing participation of the female preachers on the radio sermons and the demonstration of their religious knowledge have raised the need to re-evaluate how the Islamic authority is legitimised. The

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[56]   Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 42.

[57]   Interview with Fatma Mohammed at Radio Salaam, 28 December 2013, Mombasa; Interview with Nafisa Abdurahaman Said; Interview with Ukht Ima Hamisi at Radio Rahma, 3 January 2014, Mombasa.

[58]   Interview with Nafisa Abdurahaman Said; Interview with Faiz Musa.

radio sermons have facilitated the emergence of alternatives to a face-to-face knowledge transmission. They enable the female preachers to connect with a wide audience irrespective of gender. Clearly, these radio sermons of female preachers seem to challenge the longstanding sole influence of the male preachers as the bearers of Islamic knowledge. In this process, the female preachers supplement the male preachers' activities in disseminating religious knowledge. At the radio stations, female preachers' sermons are not regulated, indicating an acceptance and recognition of their advanced religious training.[59] Despite this apparent approval, the Muslim radio stations usually broadcast the sermons of the female preachers for free, thereby holding a considerable say in regulating the contents of the sermons. Both Radio Rahma and Radio Salaam are commercial stations that are managed by individuals representing specific doctrinal positions among the Kenyan Muslims. There is no doubt that the invited speakers have to be sensitive to the doctrinal affiliation of the owners of the radio stations.

The female religious radio programmes are anticipated to encourage a wide female participation with increased women's call-ins,[60] especially during the interactive slots. This policy of allocating certain religious programmes to the female preachers and insisting that they address their respective gender, appears to restrict their religious authority. The female focus supports the widely held opinion by conservative Muslims that it is desirable for women to be taught by a female teacher. Such categorisation suggests that the authority of these female preachers is limited as they cannot address the entire *ummah*, but only a section of the population of their religious community. Despite efforts to assign the female preachers a public space through the radio stations, it is clear that they are expected to lecture a specific gender. Despite their exceptional position as female preachers, they are confronted with certain challenges in legitimating their *da'wah* activities. Not only do they need to convince the male *ulama* that they are well-educated, they also have to convince them that they possess qualities that are naturally associated with men, like a voice. In this way, they must persuade the *ulama* that, despite being women, their voice is not soft and seductive, but deep and less feminine as demonstrated below.

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[59] Interview with Fatma Mohammed; Interview with Nafisa Abdurahaman Said; Interview with Ukht Ima Hamisi.
[60] Interview with Faiz Musa.

The Ambiguity of Women's Voices and Contested Religious Authority of Female Preachers

Admittedly, the radio programmes of the female preachers signal the ambiguous acceptance of their role in delivering sermons and contributing to *da'wah* in the Muslim communities. As they continue to offer exhortations on the radio, the female preachers are confronted with the prevailing belief that classifies their voices as nakedness (*aura*), and also questioning their competency as religious authorities responsible for *da'wah.* Some of the female preachers have received criticism for their religious radio sermons from a section of the male clerics. Their presence on the radio is questioned by the conservative *ulama* as well as some male supporters of the Salafi-Wahabi tendencies. Mzamil of Magic Studio, recording religious programmes, denounces Muslim females' preaching on the grounds that women are not authorised to engage in this activity. Providing textual support for his claim, he quotes: "Men are protectors (*Qawwam*) and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more strength than the other, and because they support them from their means (Sura 4:34)." He argues that this Qur'anic verse stipulates that males are supposed to be the guardians (*viongozi*) of women, which in a way questions the religious authority of the female speakers. He also quotes the Hadith as evidence of excluding women in managing public affairs in Muslim societies: "[T]hose who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity."[61] Armed with the two textual evidences, Mzamil goes further to explain his understanding of the issue of women and *da'wah* in Islam by emphatically arguing:

> So why should we allow female preachers to engage in *da'wah* to propagate Islam while there are men who can undertake this duty. If there was need for women to address the *ummah* as propagators of the faith, then God would also have sent to humanity as example female prophets. Why did God not send female prophets? Clearly, the responsibility of learning the faith and propagate it to the *ummah* has been bestowed upon a specific category of people – the males. So if women had similar mandate, God would have also sent female prophets.[62]

Clearly, Mzamil's view reinforces a misogynistic reading of the religious texts that have been disputed by a section of progressive voices within

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[61]   Interview with Sele Mzamil Omar Mzamil.
[62]   Interview with Sele Mzamil Omar Mzamil.

Islam.[63] Certainly, the textual sources present an "ambivalent image of female existence, allowing interpreters to develop diverse modes of gendered ritual and social practice."[64] Responding to the question of the lack of female prophets in Islamic history, Amina Wadud-Muhsin posits:

> Both men and women have been included in divine communication as the recipient of *wahy*, but there is no Qur'anic example of a woman with the responsibility of *risala*. However, all those chosen for this responsibility were exceptional…In fact, given the difficulty they have faced in getting others to accept the message when these exceptional men have come from poor classes, the likelihood of failure for the message might have been greater if women, who are given so little regard in most societies, were selected to deliver the message. It is strategy for effectiveness, not a statement of divine preference.[65]

Similarly, the Hadith quoted by Mzamil and purportedly heard by Abu Bakra (died in 671), one of the notable people of Basra during the conflict between Aisha and Caliph Ali, has been criticised as a politically opportune Hadith. After Caliph Ali successfully defeated the coalition of Aisha in the battle of Camel, Abu Bakra is reported to have narrated the Hadith to demonstrate his loyalty to the caliph after having been indecisive at the beginning of the conflict. His earlier indifferent attitude to the conflict was not to be interpreted that he supported the other party who was in fact being led by a woman – a practice that Prophet Muhammad is alleged to have condemned. The Hadith in question has been debated by Muslim scholars with some doubting its reliability and the justification of excluding women in the public sphere.[66]

Nevertheless, the view expressed by Mzamil represents the ongoing debate on the acceptability of women who preach, and their presence on radio as evident among the coastal Muslims of Kenya. The criticism of the appearance of the female radio preachers is due to the perception in Muslim societies that the sphere of public communication is the domain of men. The condemnation of female preachers' radio sermons by some Muslims demonstrates the challenges generated by the technologies of

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63 Cf. Amina Wadud-Muhsin, "Qur'an and Women," in *Liberal Islam*, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127-38; Fatima Mernissi, "A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Right in Islam," in *Liberal Islam*, ed. Charles Kurzman Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 112-26.
64 Frede, "Following in the Steps of Aisha," 244.
65 Wadud-Muhsin, "Qur'an and Women," 133.
66 Mernissi, "A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Right in Islam," 112-26.

the transmission of religious knowledge. As a result, it raises questions about the activity of female preaching and of religious authority, as well as the questions, Who is authorised to speak for Islam in public?[67] and, Does speaking on the radio make female speakers Islamic preachers and religious authorities?

In responding to the issue of *aura*, the radio stations maintain that the participation of the female preachers in the radio programmes does not contradict the Islamic position that regards her voice to be nakedness. Both stations argue that "[t]here is no conflict because these are programs that are most listened to by women."[68] Their participation in radio sermonising is not considered as addressing the *ummah*, but rather women who are alleged to prefer listening to their fellow women. Apart from the women being the main audience, the two broadcasters added that the female preachers "speak with a lot of respect," a view suggesting that their voices are not perceived as feminine and seductive. Consequently, there is a deliberate effort to constantly select those female preachers (*ustadha*) whose voices are not regarded as soft and seductive.

On their part, the female preachers consider their sermonising on the radio stations as comparable to being behind the "curtain:" "For me being at the radio station is similar to being behind a curtain, a strategy that Aisha used to conceal herself while addressing her male students," one of the female preachers argued.[69] According to Islamic history, Aisha – the wife of Prophet Muhammad – was very knowledgeable on Islamic matters and several *swahabas* (companions of Prophet Muhammad) went to her to seek religious knowledge, but behind a curtain. Therefore, "as Bibi Aisha was behind the curtain, I am in the same way today behind the 'microphone'," Fatma, one of the female preachers added.[70] In equating a radio station to a curtain, the female preachers emphasised that it is "possible to interact with the public without people [read men] seeing me."[71]

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[67] Dorothea Schulz, "Dis/embodying Authority: Female Radio 'Preachers' and the Ambivalences of Mass-mediated Speech in Mali," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44 (2012): 32.

[68] Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed 20 December 2013; Interview with Faiz Musa.

[69] Interview with Fatma Mohammed; Interview with Nafisa Abdurahaman Said; Interview with Ukht Ima Hamisi.

[70] Interview with Fatma Mohammed.

[71] Interview with Ukht Ima Hamisi.

Despite the spirited defence to justify their participation in public sermonising, there is also self-criticism by the female preachers as demonstrated by Nafisa who describes her situation as being a "conflict-ing position" every time she participates in radio sermons.[72] They are aware that, during their radio shows, there is also a male audience following the programme, but whom they would prefer to be "silent listeners." The female preachers emphasised that they do not have a problem with the silent participation of the male listeners if they would use their radio sermons as a forum for accessing religious knowledge, but if the male audience's intention is to entertain themselves with the presumed woman's tender voice, then it is this behaviour that would render their involvement in the production of mediated sermons with distaste.

Such a notion raises the question: What is it about the tone of a woman's voice that is considered disrespectful when conveying religious ser-mons? It is clear that the issue of *aura* is about the voice of the woman and religious authority. The female preachers justify their sermonising on radio by claiming that their voices are not soft, feminine, or seductive, but deep and masculine. As stated by Ukht Ima Hamisi, "The voice of a woman is *aura* when it sounds very sexy and seductive. For me, my voice is strong/deep like that of a man. This is why, when I am in the studio talking, you wouldn't know whether it is a man or a woman talking."[73] The view by Hamisi raises the question: Is religious authority in Islam associated with a male voice? Ironically, these female preachers unanimously retorted that "if a woman is aware that her voice can create *fitna*, then it is forbidden to speak through the media [both on CD/DVD and radio]."[74]

To them and their critics, a sweet and soft voice of a woman is capable of stimulating the opposite sex and attracting strong sexual desires. Arguably, it is not true that all men hear the high and soft voices of women in this manner, but some are attracted to the deep and sultry voice of the opposite sex. Clearly, female preachers in coastal Kenya are compelled to talk with a "manly" voice in order for them to be accepted and provided with a platform to articulate issues concerning their faith. The foregoing comment demonstrates that critics of the radio-mediated

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[72] Interview with Nafisa Abdurahaman Said.
[73] Interview with Ukht Ima Hamisi.
[74] Interview with Fatma Mohammed.

sermons of the female preachers support the commonly held opinion by Muslims "that women should not be allowed to preach in public because of the seductiveness of their voices."[75] In their effort to address a wide constituency of Muslims on the radio, the female preachers in Kenya are unable to operate outside the societal understanding of sexual ethics within Islam. One could therefore never expect the radio sermons to facilitate the free expression of the females within the Muslim public.[76] The authority exercised by female preachers is limited, because the conservative norms that govern the mainstream Muslim societies are structured against the participation of women as equal to men. The female preachers could have a good education, but they are expected to only address a specific gender of the population. Their participation in the transmission of Islamic knowledge is expected to complement the male clerics' sermons and are not regarded as "a substitute for, or rival to, male authority."[77] As a result, the female preachers in Mombasa can only exist with the consent of the male religious authorities in the Muslim communities.

The female preachers do not interpret this societal arrangement that reinforces customs promoted by conservative *ulama* toward women in the Muslim societies, as oppression. In their radio sermons, the female preachers do not question the social arrangements that put women in a subordinate position. In their silence, these prominent conservative female preachers appear to support the structured social system. Their comments and postures can be seen as authenticating the ethical regulation that puts women in an inferior position on a social and religious level, thereby conforming to the conservative Islamic practice that gives "men excessive control over women."[78] They passionately argue for the maintenance of the *status quo*, rejecting emancipation, and as a result their emergence should not be viewed as an attempt to alter the social and ethical system that restricts their activities in the public.

While a public space has been created by the male dominated religious establishment for female preachers on the Muslim radio stations, this recognition is due to the women's ability to mobilise themselves as teachers in their respective women's learning circles. Muslim women's

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[75] Schulz, "Dis/embodying Authority," 24.
[76] Schulz, "Evoking Moral Community," 58-59.
[77] Kalmbach, "Social and Religious Change in Damascus," 50.
[78] Kalmbach, "Social and Religious Change in Damascus," 55.

participation in *da'wah* activities is relegated to same-sex interaction even when the setting changes for a radio station. The emphasis that the female preachers place on the significance of sexual "decency" is in accordance to the type of moral guidance demanded by the male *ulama*. Women who decline to accept these laid-down constraints are not accepted as legitimate religious authorities or "good" Muslims by the mainstream *ulama*.

Conclusion

The debate on female mediated sermons and the question of who is authorised to publicly speak for Islam have been raised by the introduction of the Muslim radio stations in Kenya. Despite limitations imposed by some conservative *ulama*, new forms of female religious authorities represent a significant development among Kenyan Muslims. Though the Kenyan Muslim communities are generally biased towards women, recent developments have seen their increased public presence in radio programmes as a religious authority, raising their social reputation in society. It is considered appropriate for women to conduct their lectures in a particular speech mode and within certain conditions, whereas male preachers are "free to move and lecture in a variety of public settings" and are "less bound by an etiquette of modest speech."[79] The charge of seductiveness against the female preachers is a threat to their integrity as they strive to present themselves as decent religious role models. This denigration implies that a gender-specific conceptualisation of acceptable speech exists among Kenyan Muslims, impeding women's efforts to contribute in the public communication of religious knowledge. The debate on the acceptability of the female preachers' radio sermons reflects "processes of negotiation and partial incorporation" as legitimate authorities without altering the conventional means of religious authority.[80]

Nevertheless, though radio sermons contribute in heightening insecurities about the female voice, they also contribute in enhancing the authority of the female Muslim preachers due to their recognition by the radio stations and the general Muslim audience in Kenya. The aversion that the female preachers encounter when sermonising on radio, illustrates the fear of the power of the female voice. Despite the fact that their involvement in offering public sermons is not aimed at amending the

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[79]   Schulz, "Dis/embodying Authority," 32.
[80]   Schulz, "Dis/embodying Authority," 38.

social and ethical structures, there is no doubt that they have challenged the established category of public religious interpretation. Their radio sermons have demonstrated how the assimilation of media technology affects conventional styles of religious knowledge transmission and engagement in Kenya.

For a continued acceptance to host a radio programme, the female preachers adopt a strategy that entails accepting the boundaries set by the religious media sponsors through the advice of the male *ulama* "vetting board." A close analysis of the female preachers' and male clergy's sermons reveal that they converge on questions related to women's rights in Muslim communities due to a patriarchal reading of the Qur'an. While there is definitely an ideological convergence between the female and male preachers on the place and status of Muslim women in society, the case of radio preaching demonstrates how the female preachers present an alternative religious authority to the patriarchal social order. However, as a product of patriarchal patronage, the female preachers in the various radio programmes do not exhibit a degree of autonomy of critical thought. Their usage of the radio platform is not aimed at subverting the co-opted social control of Muslim women in society, because their reading of Islamic doctrine does not differ from that of traditional Muslim clerics. This is attributed to the fact that the female preachers concerned are not explicitly progressive feminist religious thinkers or activists, but instead that they comply with the existing structures defined by the male *ulama*. However, with the opportunities of education (both secular and religious), media diversifi-cation, and greater consumer choice, this situation could change in future, witnessing a strong feminist religious activism.

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Gender Bargains in a Pentecostal (Born-Again) Marriage: Divorce as a Socio-religious Discourse in the Glorious Vessels International Chat Group

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ABSTRACT
The rise of the Pentecostal movement in the last three decades is one of the most striking features in the global topography of contemporary religion. In Switzerland, the Pentecostal or charismatic movement is the most popular strand of migrant Christianity. This article is based on a three-year online ethnographic participant observation of different Nigerian-led online Pentecostal groups. The use of diverse interactive spaces seems to be of particular significance to both mega and non-mega Nigerian-led Pentecostal migrant churches in the country. By exploring the social practices of online communities such as the Glorious Vessels International WhatsApp chat group, the article shows how different forms of biblical patriarchy shape conversations that "recognise" or "repress" the rights and roles of women – their economic status and sexuality in born-again movements. The exchange of ideas that ensued on the issues of divorce among members of Glorious Vessels International shows how bargaining in the physical (real) world is transferred into the online environment. I analyse this phenomenon by understanding the ideal online religious community as an assemblage that promotes a certain gendered image of the prosperous family.

KEYWORDS
Pentecostalism; gender; conjugality; Internet; community; assemblage theory

Introduction

Before the advent of the Internet, the definition of "community" revolved around concepts of place and physical territory. Today, however, advanced technologies have enabled multitasking interactions, while the Internet has become "a place to construct identities, forge new connections, which ultimately enhances the creation of socially produced spaces."[1] E-mails and social media (such as Facebook, YouTube, and

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1   Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (eds.), *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1; Walter C. Ihejirika, "In-Line Religion: Innovative Pastoral Applications of the New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTS) by the Catholics of Nigeria," *Politics and Religion Journal* 2, no.2 (2008): 79-80; Yvette Taylor, Emily Falconer and Ria Snowdown, "Queer Youth, Facebook and Faith: Facebook Methodologies and Online Identities," *New Media & Society* 16, no.7 (2014): 138.

KingsChat[2]) have also made communication much easier. Altogether, these technological advancements have made it necessary to reconsider traditional conceptions of community, interaction, and networking. In this article, I will examine the significance of these transformations with regard to online religious communities and specifically how they are used by Nigerian-led Pentecostal churches. Although establishing an online church is cheaper than establishing a physical church, "place" still plays a role in the online space. This is why it is necessary to study online religious communities in the context of particular locations as this article does for Nigerian-led Pentecostal churches in the German-speaking Switzerland.

Launching into the World Wide Web requires a combination of spatial and non-spatial worlds in order for the Internet to mediate between the profane (physical) and the sacred (spiritual). Non-mega Pentecostal churches that do not have an affiliation to a parent church in the home country exhibit a unique relation between the spatial and non-spatial world, the sacred and the profane. Glorious Vessels International (GVI), as an example of a non-mega church, have recruited online followers by gathering different Internet evangelists into a single assemblage.[3] These online members are part of the expressive and material components of the GVI chat community.[4]

At this point, it is sufficient to rely on Stephen Jacobs' summation that online churches can act as supplements to physical churches.[5] Steven Jones asks the question: "Who are we when we are online?"[6] At a time when we can hardly imagine social space without mobile and online media,[7] it is imperative for scholarship to address cases like the GVI chat

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[2]   KingsChat is a mobile messaging application created by Pastor Chris Oyakilome of Christ Embassy International. It is similar to WhatsApp and allows group and individual chats.

[3]   Members mainly exist online as they belong to other offline religious organisations.

[4]   Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage theory and Social Complexity* (Hampshire: Ashford Colour Press Ltd., 2006), 4.

[5]   Stephen Jacobs, "Virtually Sacred: The Performances of Asynchronous Cyber-Rituals in Online Spaces," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no.3 (2007): 1104.

[6]   Steven G. Jones, *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* (London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 15.

[7]   Miyase Christensen, André Jansson and Christian Christensen, *Online Territories: Globalization, Mediated Practice and Social Space* (Weil am Rhein: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), xii.

community. As a result, online platforms of Nigerian-led Pentecostal churches are not exceptional in how they take advantage of the Internet to enhance aspects of Pentecostalism in order to create an environment where members project a gendered image of a prosperous family.

Methodology

I began with a participant observation of the activities of the GVI church by attending church services and proposing my research intentions in Dietlikon, Zürich. I then consistently monitored the church's activities on WhatsApp. On 29 July 2015 I realised that I had been added to a Christian WhatsApp chat group created by Pastor Rook of GVI. I received daily posts on my mobile device about devotional prayers and other spiritual information about the church's activities. I observed the frequency of the posts for two years and then sought Pastor Rook's consent to engage in a group discussion with members. I posted questionnaires containing themes for group discussions on the chat platform. Then I exploited an opportunity presented by GVI for a seminar on "singles and married couples" in Zürich to discuss participants' motivation for joining the GVI chat, since many of them did not live in Switzerland. An interview with Pastor Rook and the group discussion revealed that the GVI WhatsApp chat community is an agenda to build an online church or community as a supplement to its local ministry. Critical discourse analysis was crucial to selecting discourses in the GVI chat community.

This article uses critical discourse analysis regarding discourse as a social practice, implying a dialectical relationship between a discursive event and the situation. Critical discourse analysis allows the selection of discourses and the exploration of social practices in online communities such as the GVI WhatsApp chat community.[8] This process shows how different forms of biblical patriarchy have informed conversations that recognise or repress the rights and roles of women – their economic status and sexuality – in the born-again movement. The starred message icon helped to store important debates among mentees within the community for later analysis. I therefore arranged coded rhetoric similar to mission, rituals, evangelism, Internet, community, and tithe as major themes of understanding the concept of online community-building. By using a deductive approach and semi-structured interviews

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[8] Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak (eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 11-2.

to my online ethnographic observation to identify relevant subjects for analysis, I questioned members about the most vital aspects of relationships, such as marriage. One of the advantages of the Internet community is that it allows the anonymity of members. During the course of my observations in the GVI chat community, members who were not restricted to a geographical enclave became more familiar with one another. However, WhatsApp is a semi-anonymous environment that allows members to identify themselves through profile pictures. In the case of GVI, the possibility of exerting confidence and trust in one another is due to the assurance derived from the method of selecting members by Pastor Rook.[9]

The Nexus between Assemblage Theory and Online Communities

The assemblage theory is relevant to this article because it explains how the online communities of Nigerian-led Pentecostal churches reterritorialise non-spatial environments in order to carry out aspects of their lived Pentecostalism. According to Manuel DeLanda, territorialisation implies an acute sharpening of boundaries, resulting in a homogenisation of cultures. As described in his book, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, territorialisation is the final stage of an assemblage.[10] Homogenisation refers to sorting processes and the selection of members that exclude certain categories of people from a community or organisation, or to segregation processes that increase the ethnic or racial homogeneity of a neighbourhood.[11] Through this means, the online pastor of GVI was able to choose members from different parts of the world who subscribe to doctrines or the Pentecostal belief in the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is the belief in the Holy Spirit that homogenises the chat community.

DeLanda understands the processes that either destabilise spatial boundaries or increase the internal heterogeneity of a neighbourhood as deterritorialisation.[12] Communication technologies ranging from writing

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[9] This semi-anonymous environment is an online space where partial identity can be revealed, unlike other communities where identities are open, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Teachers Connect, SK-Gaming, or anonymous environments such as Popcorn messaging and Rumr.

[10] DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*.

[11] DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 4-5.

[12] DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society,* 4-5.

and a reliable postal service to telegraphs, telephones, and computers fit the definition of deterritorialisation, since they blur the spatial boundaries of social entities by eliminating the need for a physical presence. DeLanda shows that an assemblage is not just a collection of things or people;[13] an assemblage is when things or entities have relationships with each other to such an extent that the relationship is more than the ability of people to interact and, more importantly, to express their innermost thoughts. For instance, when an individual is able to use a tool such as a telephone from a place with a circuit board that contains the online/offline brain, then these combinations become an assemblage. DeLanda's contribution to the assemblage theory explains how the capacities of structures and actors to interact separately as agents constitute one another dialectically. In this instance, I refer to interior relations among members such as those fostered by a participation in discourses on socio-religious practices on the GVI. Constituent parts of the (GVI) "whole" cease to be effective when their properties are reduced in contrast to when they were part of a seamless "whole." Therefore, an individual cannot log into the Internet to connect the assemblage of the GVI chat community without an electronic device such as a mobile phone or a computer. The potential for online communities is enhanced through the texts, videos, voice recordings, and images that members of imagined communities use to communicate.[14] This includes how people gain access to the community, interact with one another, perform and creatively explore rituals, and are driven by the motor of communication and the interfaces of online platforms.

By carefully selecting different members for her WhatsApp community – members who physically met for the first time during the group discussion that I conducted in Dietlikon, Zürich – Pastor Rook furthered the homogenisation of the group. While scholars working with a secularisation model have often suggested that online environments promote individuality and so contribute to the "lost souls" and decline in church membership in Europe,[15] members of the GVI are consistently

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[13] DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society,* 4.

[14] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006), 6-7.

[15] Afe Adogame. "Reverse Mission: Europe a prodigal Continent," The University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, Unpublished Study Material (2006), 1; Afe Adogame, *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora* (Leiden, London: Brill, 2019), 14. In this manuscript, Adogame refers to "Reverse Mission/Flow," which is often based on the compulsion

building relationships with other online religious communities. It is important to consider how online communities have influenced the practice of religion in Nigerian-led Pentecostal communities. The following excerpts (1, 2, and 3) from interviews are useful for understanding the GVI members' perceptions of the online "mission." Excerpt 1:

> My perspective is based on my experience. The world is getting more broken and sinful as [I] would like to call it and have the experience of what it means to be in a broken relationship, a sinful relationship, to be single…I believe that God wants to use me. The Internet makes the church more effective; I call it church without walls. I engage daily with over 30,000 people on Facebook and I find that very dynamic because my messages and voice go to lands I will probably never be.[16]

The excerpts used in this article not only show the importance of digitalisation for Pentecostals, but also illustrate how religious concerns mandate that these communities preach online. This is how Pastor Rook justifies the online presence of religious communities in the above excerpt. Furthermore, embodiment is a critical aspect of corporeal representtation and the formation of social life: in a non-spatial environment, one can either be present (embodied) or non-present (disembodied). Nevertheless, the representation of personalities on the Internet features gestures and expressions that evidence realness and a sense of being present in both the online and offline worlds. For instance, greetings, fasting, daily devotion, expressing opinions, and lurking are rituals in the online environment.[17] Excerpt 2:

> The important thing is that you reach people and…the best way to do it is to go on the Internet platform to preach online. The goal of that is that Jesus told us to go into the world and make disciples. That is what we do![18]

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imposed by the "divine commission" to spread the gospel in Europe. The rationale becomes tenable since Europe embraces secularisation, which appears to be the cause of lost souls and religious decline on the continent.

[16] Peter A. Oderinde, "The Role of Internet in Migrants' Christianity: A Case Study of Nigerian-Led Pentecostal Churches in Switzerland" (PhD diss., University of Basel, Nov. 2019), 32.

[17] T.L. Taylor, "Living Digitally: Embodiment in Virtual Worlds," in *The Social Life of Avatars: Presence and Interaction in Shared Virtual Environment,* ed. Ralph Schroeder, (London: Springer, 2002), 42.

[18] Oderinde, "The role of Internet," 232.

Both Pastor Rook (in excerpt 1) and Brother Francois (in excerpt 2) display an existential need for communion and the territorialisation of online space, which they achieve by setting up a specific identity through gatekeeping for an online prayer community. One of the main points in the selected excerpts intersects with the example of assemblage as shown in excerpt 3:

> This particular group is encouraging. For others, I mute the notifications when it is too much, but I can read them whenever I want. This is only when I go there and use whatever information I want. Coming into discussion sometimes is not just about people gathering. The goal is to reach people. If you reach people online, it goes even the places you can never imagine. It is taking God's work high. The technology thing is not bad; it is one of the most beautiful things. As we have seen, the word of God can still spread through these means.[19]

In this excerpt, Sister Glorious reveals how she unplugs herself from an online community by muting notifications. In this way, she assumes a disembodied role with the advantage of being able to observe comments and instructions from the community. As a result, territorialisation forms the essence of homogenisation among GVI members. Invitations into the assemblage operate as a homogenising strategy for non-spatial environments. In this way, Internet religion provides a backdrop for the study of the GVI as a form of online religious community. In other words, online communities serve as a point of departure for the formation of different assemblages. The synergy between online and offline environments is so strong that both environments require an embodiment to function as "actual environments." Aspects of online lived Pentecostalism show what types of communities are created in these non-spatial environments and how social structures promote daily practices. The GVI's motivation for an online presence provides examples of how these practices are lived in the actual world, that is in the fusion of both offline and online worlds.

Online Lived Pentecostalism: Gender Discourse in the GVI Chat Room

The GVI WhatsApp chat community provides exceptional insights into how online Pentecostalism is lived by members who belong to several other offline interdenominational churches. For the purposes of this article, I consider online lived Pentecostalism to involve individuals' daily

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19   Oderinde, "The role of Internet," 232.

activities or actions within or directed at a spiritual or secular online community with goals that are essential to Christian vitality. I agree with Stephen Hunt that these online communities are "a medium of soliciting alternative meaning or therapy of life."[20]

The GVI chat community discusses relationships between themselves and with outsiders, whom they refer to as "non-believers." Thus, the popular phrase of the Pentecostals, "we are in the world but not of the world," underscores the underlining mission of these modern evangelical crusaders. For example, in 2 Corinthians 6:14 the Bible advises Christians to not be equally yoked with the unbelievers.

As a result, this article tries to understand how the ideal Pentecostal couple is constructed. In the following analysis, the GVI constructs relationship as if members of the community need each other. The GVI chat community bases its perspectives on the positive sides of life, love, and family. The GVI chat community promotes an ideal woman and man. The ideals correspond to the perfect husband, wife, and family. Their offline world has a gendered hierarchical structure, assigning specific roles to couples, anchored on biblical foundations. Specific cases of roles assigned to gendered typologies of male and female are provided below in figures 1 and 2.

On WhatsApp, the GVI promotes socioreligious issues, especially with regard to the role of women in the offline Pentecostal household. The conservative informed interactions of GVI members mean that mentees were able to post their views from personal experiences and biblical injunctions. Pastor Rook is clearly motivated by trying to give "hope for the hopeless" in how she selects her mentees on WhatsApp.[21]

The functionality of the GVI assemblage depends largely on socio-religious discourses that influence patterns of conversation about specific themes. For instance, Pastor Rook's theological objective focuses on building healthy relationships between couples while mentoring singles and divorcees. The mentees that constitute the GVI community

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[20] Stephen Hunt, "Managing the Demonic: Some Aspects of the Neo-Pentecostal Deliverance Ministry," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 13, no.2 (2008): 215.

[21] Pastor Rook describes herself as a mentor, while the GVI community members are her mentees.

are singles, divorcees, and individuals who wish to improve their relationships with their spouses. Excerpt 4:

> The Lord told me that there are people that will never or that may never make it to church, and they will need that last straw of hope and this will be their Hope Now. It focuses on relationship issues. It believes one of the pivotal things affecting humans is relationship; it does not matter to which relationship. It may be parent-child relationship, boss-worker relationship, boyfriend-girlfriend or husband-wife, as we are all product of social relations. I really get inspired talking about merged families and co-habitation. We address real life situations that are happening and allow people to talk about why they are in such a relationship or why they are in such situations. The divorced…feels rejected from the church because they are divorced.[22]

This excerpt shows that Pastor Rook's previous life as a single mother is informed by her theological understanding of an ideal relationship. What is sinful and responsible is connected to the mentees' age. Age is therefore a key determinant for discussions on gender roles in a born-again relationship. In this part, I will discuss a set of rules and guidelines that often relies on the Bible to regulate gender relations, rules "to which genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may [not] be contested, redefined, and renegotiated."[23] Furthermore, a discourse on coping strategies for marriages in the offline world, especially when confronting quotidian responsibilities in the household, are discussed. The key to successful marriages, as perceived by members of the GVI, thus aligns with the prosperity gospel in the age of broken marriages between born-again Christians.[24] However, the discourse on the GVI chat community does not recognise other sexualities such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, or transsexuals. The analysis below does not intend to show how the Bible is instrumentalised in the oppression of women. Instead, figures 1, 2, and 3 extrapolate socio-spiritual and economic values that members of the GVI community place on the role of women within the household.

While earlier movements achieved a phenomenal change in the late nineteenth century, the women's liberation movement and feminist-informed theologies first came into the limelight at the beginning of the

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22 Oderinde, "The Role of Internet in Migrants' Christianity," 216.
23 Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2 no.3 (1988): 287.
24 Paul Gifford, "The Prosperity Theology of David Oyedepo, Founder of Winners," in *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond,* ed. Andreas Heuser (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Publishing, 2015), 84.

second half of the twentieth century.[25] Successive feminist-informed theologies were recognised for their efforts in pushing for equal rights in the Pentecostal ministry.[26] Pastor Rook's online initiative is an exemplary effort of asserting her vision to reform the mindset, and to especially reintegrate the divorcees, widows, and widowers into Christendom with adequate spiritual contents tailored to the needs of her mentees through her online platforms.[27]

The GVI chat platform is an assemblage of individuals seeking spiritual information on marital issues. Yet the discussions of marriage on the GVI chat platform unpack interactive repertoires that reflect how gender roles are positioned and recognised.[28] The individuals in the community are conservative Christians who believe that the Bible is the sole arbiter of morality and that it stipulates how men and women should be taught to believe, act, behave, and position themselves in society. This part thus analyses conversations that took place in a space where both men and women discuss gender-based duties within the household.

Knowledge transfer is one of the most important features on the online platforms of Nigerian-led Pentecostals. Members of the GVI chat often rely on major Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria to shape and construct the ideal partner in a Pentecostal relationship. For instance, in a post from 8 January 2017, titled "Ancient wisdom for singles and married," the general overseer of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles, Dr Daniel Olukoya, enumerates various ways of discerning good characteristics in a good husband or wife. He describes wedding as only a day while marriage is a lifetime and admonishes couples to follow God's expectations in marriage. In order to avoid "hell on earth," Christians are offered

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[25] Angie Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (London: Routledge, 2009), 80-5. Women played a key role at the beginning of the movement. For instance, the first individual to have spoken in tongues was a woman and many served as evangelists, missionaries, teachers, and so on; Charles H. Barfoot and Gerald T. Sheppard, "Prophetic vs Priestly Religion: The Role of Women Clergy in Classical Churches," *Review of Religious Research* 22, no.1 (1960): 2.

[26] Caryn D. Riswold, "Conversations and Intersections: A Third-Wave Feminist Approach to Gender, Christianity and Theology," in *Sex, Gender and Christianity,* eds. Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 80-2.

[27] Pastor Rook's vision is not only limited to WhatsApp, but her ministerial activities focusing on the "neglect" of these categories of individuals can be followed live on Facebook by fans, mentees, and friends.

[28] Riswold, "Conversations and Intersections," 80-2.

prescriptions in the GVI chat community for preventing a bad marriage through prayer and observation. Men are advised to look for a woman who fears God, and who has wisdom and discretion, while women are advised to avoid men who are hot tempered, womanisers, and drunks.

Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate the thoughts and discussions of GVI members on the role of women. Pastor Ladoo's post below in figure 1, dated 23 August 2016 and titled "My Wife, My Rib," spells out seven biblical instructions about the role of men within a Pentecostal household. Figures 1 and 2 allow us to compare the expected roles of women and men in a Pentecostal marriage.

My Wife, My Rib
• Do not shout at your wife, it really hurts her (Proverbs 15:1).
• Do not speak evil of her with anyone. Your wife will become who you call her (Genesis 2:19).
• Do not share her love or affection with another woman. It is called adultery (Mathew 5:28).
• Do not allow her to beg for sex. She owns your body just as much you [own] her body (1 Corinthians 7:5).
• Do not make a negative comment about her body. She is a living soul, not just flesh and blood [no biblical verse attached].
• Not all women can cook the same way; appreciate your wife's food. It is not easy to cook three meals a day, three hundred sixty-five days a year for several years (Proverbs 31:14).
• Grow to be like Christ, that is the only way you can become a good and godly husband. Amen (Romans 8:29).
Amen.

Figure 1: My wife, my rib[29]

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[29]   Oderinde, "The role of Internet," 216.

Hardcore Truth About Marriage! If You Agree, Tag Your "Spouse" and Share Ten Ways of Becoming a Warrior Wife

The warrior wife knows marriage is difficult, particularly if you do not put the time and effort into building a strong foundation. It gets easier with time, but during the process of growing into mature, selfless spouses, marriage requires the will to fight for the union…Marriage is for warriors. To be a warrior-wife you must be willing to go to war for your marriage. Here are ten ways wives can become warriors for their marriages and families.

First, A PRAYER WARRIOR: A wife who knows the power of prayer. She intercedes for her husband and children.

Second, A WORSHIP WARRIOR: A wife is not afraid to praise and worship God.

Third, A WORD WARRIOR: A wife who uses her words to speak life and wisdom of her husband and children.

Fourth, A MOTHER WARRIOR: A mother warrior believes her role as a mother is a divine responsibility that God will hold her accountable for how she rears her children.

Fifth, A FINANCIAL WARRIOR: A wife who can take a few francs and make a meal that tastes like a million bucks.

Sixth, A DISCERNMENT WARRIOR: A wife with a sixth sense to see and feel what is good and bad for the marriage.

Seventh, A HOUSEHOLD WARRIOR: A wife who protects the peace and sanctity of the home.

Eighth, A SEXUAL WARRIOR: A wife who is not afraid to enjoy physical intimacy with her husband. She initiates sex and enjoys pleasing her husband.

Ninth, A CONFIDENT WARRIOR: A wife who can make her husband feel like he can do anything he sets his mind to.

Tenth, A PURPOSE DRIVEN WARRIOR: A wife who knows God has a purpose for marriage.

Figure 2: Hardcore Truth About Marriage! [30]

The following conversation took place regarding these ten ways:

Renii: We can also turn it the other way around and treat the husband likewise.

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[30]   Oderinde, "The Role of Internet," 218.

Pastor Ladoo: God told the man to love, not the woman.

Pastor Rook: Truly submissive women eventually earn a place with most men. I know women liberation is not popular teaching but I always say learn to speak to a man like a king and you will become queen in his mind. God told women to submit because the only thing a man longs for from a woman is respect.

Sister Kuks: Same way women will account for the way they respected their man.

Pastor Ladoo: I need to buy her a gift, lace or flowers?

Sister Gloria: Naija [Nigeria] women.

Brother Mac: Most Naija women will want lace first.

Pastor Rook: Start with the unusual oo, followed by lace.

Pastor Ladoo: you don't know our women, they might say what is dis? Am I a goat that eats flowers?

Sister Glorious: For me I like the unusual like flowers and cute fluffy teddy, etc. Not all Naija women are rigid please. 😄😄😄

Pastor Rook: flowers first oo, start with the unusual; most [Nigeria] women want lace first.

Opinions in the above chat about the disagreement of whether to give flowers or lace display differing nuances of showing appreciation to women by the Pentecostal believers.

Figures 1 and 2 prescribe gender roles that acknowledge responsibilities within a Pentecostal home – becoming a "warrior wife" implies sub-servience to her husband. Following the ten guidelines will lead to a woman being treated with fairness and equity in her husband's home. This implies learning to speak to her husband "like a king and you will become queen."

As shown in figure 1, Pentecostals rely heavily on the Bible for "conventions that not only guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself, which require taboos and a punitive regulation of reproduction to effect that end."[31] Figure 1 also specifically emphasises the aesthetics of the female body, which has far-reaching effects in determining their status at home and in society. For instance, remarks such as "Do not make a negative comment about her body;" "Do not let her body determine her worth;"

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[31]   Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomeno-logy and Feminist Theology," *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (1988): 524.

"Invest in her spiritual growth;" "Do not allow her to beg for sex;" and "She is a living soul, not just flesh and blood" reinforce pre-existing cultural roles. Figure 2 furthermore assigns traditional financial responsibilities in the family. The GVI members' conversations focused on these topics related to marriage for several weeks:

Pastor Ladoo: I think sex is still regarded as too religious in marriages. Is it sinful for a man of God to go online to please his wife or *vice versa*? How would you react if your wife starts reading Kamasutra books? I think some men prefer to please their mistress in bed more than they please their wives. I hope I haven't crossed the red line here…Just dropping a line. Good night.
Pastor Rook: I will reply according to this tomorrow.
Brother Mac: Yes, this is a real discussion board.[32]

The specific point referring to a wife reading the "Kamasutra books," poses a dilemma for the Pentecostal woman who desires to please her husband by limiting the exploration of her sexuality to the confines of Pentecostal doctrines. Sister Glorious also noted this focus in a description of the group: "You should know that the group is not all about spiritual matters. People do post social issues. Spiritual and the physical are together"[33] (excerpt 5).

During the group discussion at Dietlikon, GVI chat members were reticent to speak openly about physical intimacy. However, in excerpt 6 below, Brother Renii distinguishes the GVI from other online Christian communities by the willingness of members to discuss the subject matter freely online. He mentions women (working as sex workers) in Zürich as an example of how sex is negotiated between two parties, alluding to the fact that women are also more vulnerable to being sexually exploited in Pentecostal conjugality. This is why Christian couples should have open discussions about sex: it will ensure a more fulfilling marriage as seen in the following excerpt:

> Men go to Langstrasse because of what they want, and women give it because they want money. I mean it is a deal! My point is how we deal with that as a church. We cannot close our eyes and say let us be nice towards one another by not mentioning the points we do not like. It needs

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32   Oderinde, "The role of Internet," 220.
33   Oderinde, "The role of Internet," 219.

to be discussed and especially many churches do these mistakes. While claiming to be spiritual, many churches do not talk about sex, but we talk about it![34]

Figures 1 and 2 give the impression that marriage is difficult but rewarding. Marriage requires that the couple be thorough and spiritually prepared to face offline difficulties. As a consequence, marriage is described as a process and not as a state of being. For example, the female "warrior" in figure 2 indicates that women should want to fight for the survival of the marriage. The institution of marriage is described as a spiritual battle. Strong emphasis is placed on "time" and "effort," which are key for a solid foundation in a Pentecostal household. The aggressive tone in the language of the post aligns with the doctrines of the Nigerian-led Pentecostals, which speak of believers battling spiritually and physically. On the other hand, the description of the ideal woman casts her as a mature, selfless, and perfect servant, who makes the best choices for her family.

Pastor Ladoo sought the opinion of other GVI members on how to appease his wife as a strategy for resolving conflicts in his family. The remarkable conversation that ensued as a result of figure 2 shows how some Pentecostal women engage with a biblically informed patriarchy. The perception of women is clear in Pastor Ladoo's confusion about his limited choices of buying either roses or an expensive lace fabric, which is widely common as a traditional outfit in the South of Nigeria. When Pastor Ladoo states that "most women in Naija would want lace first" and that "they might say…what is dis [this]? Am I a goat that eats flowers?" he contrasts Western women, who attach a symbolic value to roses, with Nigerian women, who desire gifts with material value such as lace or money. The opinions expressed by GVI members, especially the female ones in this conversation, show different patterns of conflict resolutions within the Nigerian cultural milieu. The exchange of ideas that ensued among members of the GVI also shows how bargaining ideas shared in the online setting are transferred into offline realities.

The post on the "warrior" wife in figure 2 describes an ideal Pentecostal wife to the GVI members. Although the overarching trajectory implies that the family gains access to God through the wife, the wife requires a good relationship with her husband.

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[34]   Oderinde, "The role of Internet," 220.

Men Who Give their Women ATM Cards and Pins Have a Special Corner in Heaven with Air Conditioners and Free Wifi Access… Amen

Figure 3: Men Who Give their Women ATM Cards

Figure 3 shows that prosperity is essential to the Pentecostal or born-again identity.[35] The rhetoric in the figure resonates well with the role of the "financial warrior" in figure 2. A wife is a financial warrior when she "can take a few [Swiss] francs and make a meal that tastes like a million bucks." This role assumes that the husband is the breadwinner and that it is up to the wife to manage the money she is given prudently – though the husband's heavenly aspirations are then also dependent on his financial warrior's ability to organise the economy of the household well.

The symbiotic relationship allows women to take some emancipative stances, which are evidenced in figures 1, 2, and 3. Husbands are told to put their wives first as, to some extent, Pentecostal women are expected to be in control of the household. It strengthens the fact that, in the household, men could allow to be controlled by women in order not to lose the "treasure" of their wives to anger, which could sabotage the marriage. Calling the ideal woman a "warrior," emphasises that she must be strong, but the appellation also confers a heavy burden on the wife in the areas of physical intimacy and financial management, in order not to lose her husband. Point eight (the sexual warrior) portrays a wife who is fearless of physical intimacy with her husband. The main concern in the text is that the wife must enjoy pleasing her husband. If, for instance, the term "warrior" is replaced with *labourer*, then the logic becomes apparent. If the wife says something negative (see point 6 about the warrior wife), then the family's misfortune becomes her fault. That means that

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[35] Cf. Andreas Heuser, "Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies," *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no.3 (2016): 2-3.

the wife labours for both tangible and intangible gains in the household with a *sixth* sense, as mentioned in the post. This sixth sense (figure 2) derives from the wife's connection to God, grants her the power of discernment, and is necessary for a good, true marriage. Point six (the discernment warrior) and point three (the word warrior) are thus very important characteristics, indicating that she foresees danger. The aim of the author of the post was to show how powerful Pentecostal women are in the ways of channelling their powers. The text is an emancipative model for Pentecostal women and calls for self-regulation, not because they are "warrior-slaves," but because of their powerful tongues.

Pastor Ladoo introduced another discussion on marriage on 22 January 2017 with the post: "You don't have to be born-again to enjoy your marriage, yes or no?" Pastor Rook responded almost immediately:

> 😊 my answer is yes and no. E.g my neighbors. The wife only became a believer about 21 years ago. Her husband is not a believer, but they have been married almost 40 years now. I know other examples of unbelievers with very strong marriages simply because they unwittingly submit to the principles of the word of God, which is LOVE & RESPECT.[36]

In the conversation that ensued, GVI members stated their belief that God ordains the marriage, but they also mentioned that it is a gift to non-believers as well, as long as the husband loves the wife and the wife respects her husband. In this instance, non-believers include not only people who do not follow Jesus Christ today, but also the members' own ancestors who never met Christ but enjoyed the company of their husbands. The members had differing opinions about whether being born-again ensures a happy home. In many cases of disagreement in the discussion, members consulted other communities or assemblages to which they belong for answers to entangled discussions.

The conversation of GVI members on WhatsApp legitimises Hope Now[37] as a platform for bringing hope to people with marital woes by learning from others who share their real experiences online. On the discourse following the post in figure 2, opinions of members split on the submis-

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[36] Oderinde, "The role of Internet," 223.
[37] Glorious Vessels, "Hope Now," 2019, www.gloriousvessels.org/de/event/hope-now-live-tv-christian-counselling-6/.

sive woman, but all identified ignorance as the major cause of break-ups. In fact, there is also no clarity among members as to whether marriage is a spiritual or religious commitment, although Genesis 9:7 is explicit about God's commandment "to be fruitful and multiply…." Furthermore, members of the GVI decry the high divorce rate among fellow believers.

Similarly, both Western-oriented mainline churches in Africa – such as the Methodist and Anglican Churches in Nigeria – and African initiated churches allow for the constellation of both Western Christian practices and traditional African ones, including polygamy.[38] The doctrine of Pentecostalism, which preaches individualism and monogamy, has attracted millions of women in Africa and Latin America with its modernisation impulse. This pattern encourages the domestication of men, thereby changing their patriarchal role in polygamy with a more inclusive nuclear family setting. This is reflected in the statements from the chats cited in this article.[39] Although Pastor Rook identifies marital abuse as the key phenomenon wrecking the Christian marriage in this age, the conversations in the GVI chat platform show that, in spite of monogamy, the boundaries of the born-again man cannot be challenged. This is changing the traditional role of men, leading to the emotional breakdown of the African Pentecostal woman.[40]

Being a born-again Christian normatively excludes the practice of polygamy, which limits women's autonomy and men's responsibilities in supporting their families. However, the discussion is not limited to born-again marriages alone as it includes relationships between non-believers or between a believer and a non-believer, demonstrating that a successful marriage is a product of spiritual grace. On the disadvantage side, members of the GVI describe Internet as an end-time sign, which affects the marriages of believers. In the protracted conversation, members believe that technology is particularly eroding spiritual values and endangering respect for leaders.

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[38] Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4; Birgit Meyer, "Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 447-8.

[39] Bernice Martin, "The Pentecostal Gender Paradox: A Cautionary Tale for the Sociology of Religion," in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard K. Fenn (Malden, Oxford, Melbourne, Berlin: The Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 54.

[40] Rekopantswe Mate, "Wombs as God's Laboratories: Pentecostal Femininity in Zimbabwe," *Africa* 72, no.4 (2002): 557.

Conclusion

This article has shown that there is an element of realness in online religious communities, where Pentecostals share their innermost thoughts. I began by explaining how the changing concept of "community" in the contemporary era has affected modern religious institutions.

I also explained the research methods I employed for the GVI WhatsApp chat community. The GVI as an online religious community was created to cater for the needs of online spiritual inquirers or members who operate in the non-spatial territories such as the WhatsApp chat community. The latter part of the article focused on social practices, which I considered as online lived Pentecostalism in the GVI chat community. The discussion on the GVI platform shows that Pentecostals believe that the submission of a wife is necessary for gaining her husband's goodwill. Through online communities such as the GVI WhatsApp chat community, the assemblage theory relates with the concept of an online community by explaining the relationship between online and offline worlds. Within the Pentecostal milieu, the GVI is a network of individuals that is not interested in physical membership but promotes transposable Pentecostal ideas that allocate limited rights and privileges to women within born-again marriages.

The GVI online chat platform gives women the opportunity to express their opinions on the fundamental aspects of marriage, including whether they support divorce. Furthermore, it was clear in the example of the "warrior wife" that the gift of the warrior is not immune to the challenges of divorce. A true warrior woman is perceived as the real Pentecostal Christian who is willing to make the priority of the family the centrepiece of her wellbeing. In the case of the GVI, WhatsApp spirituality as a social outreach provides insight into a practical approach as to how modern Pentecostalism is lived. Through WhatsApp communication, this article shows how specific rights are allocated to gendered typologies in a Pentecostal marriage.

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The Nature and Significance of a Muslim Woman's Contest for Mayor of Lusaka, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Demonstrating the use of the media as a conduit for communicating religious messages within the political domain, this article interrogates the religion, gender, and media interface through an analysis of the nature and significance of Sirre Muntanga, the only Muslim woman candidate for mayor of Lusaka during the 2016 Zambian general elections. Scholarly engagement on the 2016 elections has focused on the Christianisation of the elections to the neglect of other religions such as Islam and its related gender discourses. Theoretical and empirical studies on religion as well as the media are still lagging in the Zambian context. Since selected members of the Muslim community used the opportunity provided by Muntanga's campaign to promote religious literacy on Islam, this article proposes that the mediatisation of Muntanga's participation in the elections provides a platform for exploring the interaction between religion and the media. The article argues that, while the interface between religion and the media is often ascribed to the growth of media technologies and a religious agenda to convey religious messages, Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka signified how religion, gender, and the media could be linked through the religionisation of politics as shaped by public curiosity and the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation.

KEYWORDS

Muslim; religion; gender; politics; Zambian elections

Introduction

In this article, the following research question is explored: What was the nature and significance of Sirre Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka during the 2016 general elections in the context of religion, gender, and the media in Zambia? The research question is premised on the basis that, despite the fact that religion and the media in the Southern African countries have recorded a boom in popularity and interest by scholars of religion,[1] Zambia had a scarcity of scholarly attention relating to this field of study. The article therefore foregrounds Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka in discourses of how the media became a conduit for communicating messages of religion and gender during the 2016 general elections in Zambia, in order to make a modest contribution towards the engagement of religion and the media in the Zambian context. Zambia

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1   Muhammed Haron, "Religion and the Media: Reflections on their Position and Relationship in Southern Africa," *Global Media Journal* 4, no.1 (2010): 28.

held its general elections on 11 August 2016 with nine contesting parties: the Patriotic Front (PF); the opposition – the United Party for National Development (UPND); the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD); the People's Alliance for Change (PAC); the United Progressive People's Party (UPP); the Rainbow Party (RP); the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD); the Green Party (GP); and the Democratic Alliance (DA). Of the positions that were being contested, the mayoral seat for Lusaka attracted Sirre Muntanga from the FDD as a contestant. Prior to the elections, different political parties and contestants were engaged in diverse campaign activities which included the use of social media platforms and the production and broadcast of adverts for radio and television, among others. Religious discourses were not absent from these campaign messages. Contestants and their supporters used the media to convey religious messages, an aspect of the campaigns that had escaped the attention of the pre-election monitors such as the Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG) of Zambia.

The inquiry which the article engages with was therefore driven by lapses in religion and the media in Zambia owing to a limited scholarly attention to the study area on one hand, and the preoccupation with Christianity to the neglect of minority religions and groups in the Zambian scholarship on the other, within the discourses of religion in public life. As observed from an African perspective, religious actors had taken advantage of the prevalence and accessibility of the mass media to continue the spread of religion and religious messages across the continent.[2] In the Zambian context, although it was acknowledged that Islam had grown over the years as evidenced by a remarkable Islamic visibility through the construction of schools, health facilities, and an active participation in social and development programmes,[3] coupled with the boom and accessibility of the mass media in the country, there was limited engagement with how the media was used as a conveyer of Islamic ideas. There was also a neglect of religious women and the media, and in particular Muslim women's engagement in public life. Hence this article focuses on how a Muslim woman, named Sirre Muntanga, asserted herself in the media during the elections in Zambia

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[2]   Gabriel Faimau and William O. Lesitaokana, *New Media and Mediatisation of Religion: An African Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 2.

[3]   Felix Phiri, *Muslims Association and the Resurgence of Islam in Zambia* (Lusaka: FENZA and Lembani Trust, 2008); World Bulletin, "Zambia's Growing Islam," 13 November 2013, https://www.worldbulletin.net/islamic-world/zambias-growing-islam-h122789.html.

by interrogating the nature and significance of her contest for mayor of Lusaka.

The article draws on the 2016 general elections context, because the elections were not only renowned for the popularity of religion in the political discourses, but also the extensive use of the media. In addition, the religion, gender, and media discourses during the 2016 general elections largely focused on the religionisation of the elections. For example, in an analysis of the interplay among the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, presidential photography, and social media, it was concluded that Edgar Lungu's social media presidential photography in various places of worship and political campaigning functioned as subliminal texts underlying the declaration as a religious-political state apparatus for political legitimisation.[4] Therefore, the religionised and mediatised elections presented an opportunity to uncover the media's interconnectedness with religion and gender through the example of the discourses that were ignited by the Muslim woman contestant in the elections.

The article argues that the media acted as an avenue for relaying messages on religion and gender. It advances that, while religion and the media were often linked, based on the development of new media technologies, the Zambian context also confirmed that religion and the media could be linked through the quest for religious literacy among the outsiders of a particular religion and the insiders. This linkage was shaped by the religionisation of politics in ways that point to the interaction of both religious and political agendas. The article proceeds with defining religionisation, highlighting the context of the setting and the approach to theory and method before discussing the nature and significance of Muntanga's contest for mayor through her representations in the media, and accounting for the ways in which the media was used as conduit for communicating Islamic messages in the context of the 2016 mayoral elections in Zambia.

Defining Religionisation and Religious Discourses

In the present context, religionisation as a term is closely linked to politics, and in particular, the political discourses of the 2016 general

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[4] Chammah J. Kaunda, "Christianising Edgar Chagwa Lungu: The Christian Nation, Social Media Presidential Photography and 2016 Election Campaign," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 4, no.1 (2018): 215-45.

elections in Zambia. Although the religionisation of politics is often largely framed in the theories of secularism where the secular and religious are interdependent,[5] the article takes a position in which, contrary to the perception of secularism, ideas are tied to the separation of powers between politics (the state) and religion (religious institutions) to the detriment of the latter.[6] As such, the religionisation of politics is employed to refer to the ways in which religion characterised the political discourses surrounding the 2016 general elections. Indirectly, the article points to how, contrary to projections that secularisation would lead to a decline of religion in public life, religion had re-entered the public sphere through politics in Zambia, among others. The religionisation of politics could be observed in the presence and influence that religion has on politics to which it serves both as a subject and an object.[7] In the 2016 general elections, religion was a subject that clouded the campaign messages and an object that was used for political gain by different players. This signified the nature of the Zambian political terrain, because religion as a political instrument could only be utilised by political systems for political gains within a society that was receptive to religion.[8]

The article employs the religionisation of politics to aid the description of the reciprocal interaction and interconnectedness of religion and politics as exemplified in the ways in which religion became part of the 2016 political discourses in the media through the example of Muntanga's narrative. In this way, the article acknowledges that religionisation relates to the lack of a clear boundary between the political and religious realms.[9] Religion and politics therefore influence each other reciprocally, with religion being politicised and politics being religionised. The religionisation of politics is also related to the ways in which religion shaped the 2016 general elections through the religious discourses, here

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[5] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 192.

[6] Peter L. Berger, "A Sociological View of Secularisation of Theology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6, no.1 (1967): 3-16.

[7] Carolina Ivanescu, "Politicised Religion and the Religionisation of Politics," *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11, no.4 (2010): 313.

[8] Jaco Beyers, "Religion as Political Instrument: The Case of Japan and South Africa," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 28, no.1 (2015): 142-64.

[9] Ivanescu, "Politicised Religion," 313.

understood as language in use,[10] constructed as oral or written texts and functioning within social contexts.[11]

Approach to Theory and Method

The article anchors the exploration of the nature and significance of Muntanga's contest in the 2016 mayoral elections on how the media shaped discourses of a Muslim woman through the concept of mediatisation and the mediatisation of religion. The theories of mediatisation and the mediatisation of religion point to the role of media in the construction of religion in a contemporary society, including the ways in which the media has become an important source of information about religious issues as well as a tool for active engagement with religion.[12] The mediatisation theory as a framework is used to aid the understanding of how the media works as a channel for religious messages, because religion is increasingly subsumed under the logic of the media through the process of mediatisation.[13] For example, as a conduit of communication, the media acts as the primary source of religious ideas, while within language and cultural environments, the media shapes the religious imagination in accordance with the genres of popular culture and takes over many of the social functions of the institutionalised religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community. The mediatisation theory is therefore used, because the focus of this article is to understand the nature and significance of a Muslim woman's contest for mayor of Lusaka in 2016.

Of the three ways of thinking about religion and media (media as conduit, language, and cultural environments), the media as conduit for communication is here deemed as significant. As such, the article particularly taps into how the media becomes a conduit for conveying religious ideas, because its interest is on uncovering how the only Muslim woman contestant has used the media to communicate Islamic messages during the electoral campaigns, and the significance of her

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[10] Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[11] Tunde Onadeko, "Discourse Analysis: The Fundamentals," in *Studies in English Language*, ed. Adeyemi O. Babajide (Ibadan: Enicrownfit Publishers, 2000), 81-104.

[12] Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lovheim (eds.), *Mediatisation of Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[13] Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatisation of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no.1 (2008): 9-26.

contest in the context of religion, gender, and the media discourses in Zambia. In this way, the article employs the mediatisation theory to discuss the role of the media in communicating religious messages and as a platform for representing religion and political discourses in the context of the 2016 general elections in Zambia.

The article is informed by the analysis of discourses surrounding a Muslim woman contestant in the 2016 general elections in the media that emerged not only from the mayoral election contender herself, but also the local leaders of the Muslim and women Muslim associations. Based on the mediatisation theoretical perspective on the role of the media in communicating religious messages and as a consequent platform for the representations of religion and politics, the article addresses the research question that focuses on exploring the nature and significance of Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka in 2016.

Given that the increasing use of smartphones and other mobile devices, together with improved internet access, present opportunities for communicating and mobilising along religious lines, social media is an area for research, as religious websites are dynamic archives of religious worlds.[14] The article also draws on social media messages (especially Facebook) of Muntanga in the public sphere in order to understand how the media has shaped the discourses of religion and gender in the context of a Muslim woman's participation in electoral politics in Zambia. In this case, the media was limited to its technological use in which it acted as a conduit for the transmission of a religious ideology and opinions. Apart from social media, the different forms of media, such as television, newspapers, and photographs in the public space are used as supplementary sources for analysis because these were prominently used during the 2016 general elections campaigns.

Contextualisation of the Setting

This section contextualises Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka by describing the religious landscape, Islam and Muslim women in Zambia, and the media context.

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[14] Rosalind Hackett, Anne Melice, Steven van Wolputte and Katrien Pype, "Interview: Rosalind Hackett Reflects on Religious Media in Africa," *Social Compass* 61, no.1 (2014): 67-72.

The Religious Landscape

Zambia is a multi-religious society with Christianity being the dominant religion. Other religions include Islam, Hinduism, and Zambian indigenous religions, as well as the Bahá'í faith, Buddhism, and Sikhism which account for smaller percentages in terms of following. After the official declaration of the country as a Christian nation and the consequent expansion of Pentecostalism in the 1990s, the religious landscape in the country completely changed as first, a religious desk at State House and more recently (2016), a Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs with the mandate of actualising the Christian declaration, were established by the state. Suffice to note that though the country is declared to be a Christian nation, the constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for the freedom of conscience, belief, and religion. The different religious communities in Zambia are therefore living in total harmony.[15]

Islam and Muslim Women in Zambia

Although Felix Phiri remarks that the reality of Islam in Zambia is barely documented,[16] there has been a growing interest in scholarship on Islam in the country. For example, in recent decades, different Zambian scholars have shown an interest in Islam, with Phiri being a prominent voice in the country. He has documented the Muslim associations and the resurgence of Islam in Zambia and linked the revival of Islam among the already existing Muslims and the increasing number of indigenous converts to Islam, to the local Muslim associations in postcolonial Zambia.[17] Other Zambian scholars have examined the teaching of Islam through religious education programmes[18] and the religious education syllabi of 2013[19] in Zambia's senior secondary schools.

In addition, a few postgraduate students at the University of Zambia have also taken an interest in Islam. These studies are related to conversions to Islam in Liteta in Zambia's central province[20] and *Zakat*'s

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15   Scott D. Taylor, *Culture and Customs of Zambia* (London: Greenwood Press, 2006).
16   Phiri, *Muslim Associations*.
17   Phiri, *Muslim Associations*.
18   Joseph Chita, "Reflecting on the Teaching of Islam in the Religious Education Teacher Education Programme," *Changing Societies and Personalities* 3, no.2 (2018): 285-91.
19   Osward Tembo and Gift Masaiti, "The Teaching of Islam in Zambia's Senior Secondary School Religious Education Syllabus of 2013: Stakeholders' Perspective," *Zambian Journal of Religion and Contemporary Religious Issues* 1, no.1 (2019): 157-78.
20   Aisha Hanjoomo, "Da'wah at Work: Investigating the Introduction of Islam in Chibombo District" (MEd diss., University of Zambia, 2014).

contributions to the alleviation of poverty in Lusaka.[21] These studies were driven by the boom of Islam that had resulted in the conversion of the indigenous Zambians from Christianity to Islam. As can be deduced, the discourse has not yet embraced the contributions of Muslim women in the country's public life. Credit is here given to Phiri[22] who has attempted to include the contributions of Muslim women to the development of Islam in the country.

By way of ethnic origin, Muslim women are divided in four major categories, namely the Asian, the Yao, the Somali, and the indigenous converts, alongside the less prominent minority groups from the Congo, as well as East and West Africa.[23] The majority of Muslim women in Lusaka are from the high-density residential areas and can easily characterise themselves as the poor of the society who deserve to be beneficiaries of *Zakat.*[24]

The Muslim women are also organised through associations. There are two prominent organisations linked to Muslim women in Lusaka, namely the Lusaka Muslim Women Trust (LMWT) and the Zambia Islamic Child Care Education and *Da'wa* Association (ZICEDA).[25] While the LMWT is a women's organisation, the ZICEDA has women representation in the administration. The LMWT provides female religious teachers in four townships of Lusaka (Matero, Old Kanyama, Chawama, and Mtendere) where the majority of the participants are lower class women. By the end of the last century, Muslim women have already taken their place in the growing Muslim community as LMWT substantially contributed to the affirmation of the Zambian Muslim women identity through religious instruction, regular gatherings, and charitable projects.[26]

Prominent Zambian Muslim women in public life in Lusaka are few. The most notable was Ayesha Kayambwe, a Catholic convert and trained primary schoolteacher who became a leading figure under the Zambian women. She was distinguished for her "audacity" to speak out in the name of Islam in general and the Muslim women in particular, and was a

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[21] Zanga Zimba, "The Impact of the Islamic Act of Almsgiving on Poverty Alleviation among the Poor in Lusaka Urban District" (MEd diss., University of Zambia, 2019).

[22] Phiri, *Muslim Associations*.

[23] Phiri, *Muslim Associations*.

[24] Taylor, *Culture and Customs*, 35-36.

[25] Phiri, *Muslim Associations*.

[26] Phiri, *Muslim Associations*.

regular guest on the radio programme, *Focus on Islam*, presented on Radio Phoenix – a programme that was cancelled mainly due to organisational difficulties among the Muslims themselves.[27] It was in this context that Muntanga emerged as a contestant in the 2016 general elections, becoming one of the notable Muslim women in the Zambian public life.

The Media Context

The media includes a wide range of communication media such as television, cinema, video, radio, photography, advertising, newspapers and magazines, recorded music, computer games, and the Internet. The relationship between the media and religion, which has currently become more popular, is not a novelty. Perhaps the important question is how the media was understood and interpreted in different historical times, be it in technological terms where the media became a conduit for the transmission of a religious ideology, or as an institution where the media became a structured complex of social relations[28] and the religious change linked to shifts in media forms and practices of mediation.[29]

In Zambia, religion and the media were popularised in the 1990s with the growth of televangelism. This was largely driven by the liberalisation of the airwaves through the Radio Communications Act (1994) that resulted in the birth of radio and television stations in different provinces. The rise of private media also entailed that religion could be mediatised widely.

Unlike South Africa where there are Muslim owned and controlled community radio stations,[30] Muslim initiatives in radio and television were yet to emerge in Zambia. Hence, Muntanga used the available media, such as radio and television feature programmes and social media platforms to communicate religious messages. This scenario resonated with the Nigerian context in which African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam used the mass media for commercialisation.[31] Despite these developments, scholarship on religion and the media in Zambia

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27 Phiri, *Muslim Associations*, 193.

28 Richard Fox, *Religion, Media and Cultural Studies: Theory, Religion and Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

29 Hackett, Melice, Van Wolputte and Pype, "Interview: Rosalind Hackett."

30 Muhammed Haron, "The South African Muslims Making (air) Waves during the Period of Transformation," *Journal for the Study of Religion* (2002): 111-44.

31 Pius Oyeniran Abioje, "A Critique of Commercialisation of Religions in Nigeria via the Mass Media," *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no.2 (2011): 57-80.

was yet to evolve. Hence this article seeks to make a modest contribution to this discourse within a Zambian context.

Sirre Muntanga, a Muslim Woman and the Media in the 2016 Mayoral Elections

This section discusses the nature and significance of Muntanga's contest in the mayoral election campaigns through discourses of the Muslim woman contestant in the media in order to demonstrate how the media became a platform for communicating messages on Islam and Muslim women in particular.

The Nature of Sirre Muntanga's Contest for Mayor of Lusaka

The nature of Muntanga's context is viewed through the prism of her Muslim identity and electoral campaign messages. As alluded to, Muntanga was the only Muslim woman contestant in the 2016 general elections. She originates from the Chawama Muslim community, one of the densely populated areas (popularly referred to as "compounds" in Zambia) in the city of Lusaka. Thus, with the exception of her religious identity as a Muslim woman and her origin, not much was revealed about Muntanga in the public discourses. The prominent portrayal remained that which was tied to her participation in politics and the consequent shift in Muslim women's participation in politics.

While Muslim participation in general elections at different levels was not new, Muslim women participating in politics, particularly as exemplified by Muntanga's contest in the elections, was a recent development in Zambia. For example, in 2004, when former President Mwanawasa visited the Makeni Islamic Centre, he commended their work through the medical clinic that serviced more than 4,000 patients per month, with the magnitude of their primary, secondary, and vocational schools around the country. Mwanawasa also implored the Muslim community to actively participate in politics. This earned Mwanawasa the support of the Kabwe Muslim Association that instructed its members to vote for him and the then ruling MMD in the 2006 presidential elections. The larger Islamic Council of Zambia (ICZ) generally endorsed Mwanawasa's appeal for greater Muslim participation in the political processes, though it adopted a nonpartisan stance and called on its membership to register to vote, cast ballots wisely, and stand as candidates in the elections.[32] As such,

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[32]   Taylor, *Culture and Customs*, 2006: 36.

Muntanga's participation in the electoral contest could not be detached from this broader Muslim engagement in the political life of the country.

Muntanga's campaign messages were centred on transforming Lusaka city:[33]

> People in Lusaka have been yearning for an opportunity to get a leader of their choice, a leader that understands, a leader that will be available, a leader that will deliver…Since independence, Lusaka residents populating the townships have been subjected to drinking water from the shallow wells. This is one of the things that we have to change in Lusaka and being one of the people that drink this kind of water daily, I know exactly what the townships need.[34]

Wearing her *hijab* on her campaign posters and messages, Muntanga presented herself as "the chosen one from the compounds, a woman who understands and has tasted the plight of the majority," youthful, dynamic and visionary, and branded herself as *msikana wa mukomboni* (a young lady from the densely populated areas).[35]

Muntanga reflected an understanding of the influence of the media through one of her quotes: "Malcolm X quotes: the media is the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent and that's power because they control the minds of the masses."[36]

Muntanga reached out to the electorates through the television and radio chat shows. For example, she featured on Joy FM, Hot FM and ZNBC television, among others, including the use of photography in places where she visited the electorates. In addition, she used her Facebook blog to convey her messages, which became an archive of her political journey. Ultimately, the nature of Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka can be described as serving both religious and political notions as shaped by her context.

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[33] Stephen Kapambwe, "Who will take Lusaka Mayoral Seat?" *Times of Zambia*, 2016, http://www.times.co.zm/?p=88028*Times of Zambia*.
[34] Kapambwe, "Who will take Lusaka Mayoral Seat?"
[35] Sirre F. Muntanga, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/sirre4lusakamayor.
[36] Muntanga, Facebook.

The Religious Discourses and the Significance of Muntanga's Contest for Mayor of Lusaka

As Muntanga presented a transformational message to the electorates, her participation in the mayoral elections ignited debates that revealed the media as a platform for communicating messages on Islam and Muslim women in particular. To start with, her identity as a Muslim woman sparked off some interest from the electorates who, among other things, questioned her participation in the elections. Apart from the curiosity from the general public, her participation in the elections also attracted a debate within her Muslim community as to whether a woman could be a political leader. The men from her own Muslim community had mixed reactions when she announced her candidacy.[37] As such, the significance of Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka was revealed through the messages on Muslim women's engagement in politics that began to enter the political sphere through the attempts to clarify her participation in the elections. For example, leaders such as those from the Zambia Interfaith Networking Group on HIV and AIDS noted that

> [t]here is a school of thought that is going to tell you that women are not supposed to vie for political positions; they are supposed to be at home. Another school of thought from the feminists would tell you they need to; in fact, they will tell you that women can even lead prayers…Islam believed that for society to succeed, the family has to be built on a solid foundation and the person that builds that solid foundation is a woman. If a woman's participation in politics is going to take her away from the home, then there is a problem. But if a woman can manage both her duties at home while taking responsibilities elsewhere, there is nothing wrong with her participating in politics.[38]

The concerns over a woman's participation in political leadership within the Muslim community also resonated with some elements in the Zambian indigenous religious worldview that tended to support patriarchal systems. For example, in an analysis of the Zambia National Women's Lobby group in the 2001 tripartite elections, it was revealed that women had long played a largely supportive role in the national Zambian politics perpetuated by the patriarchal notions of women as mere supporters of the male dominated society.[39] Apart from the

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[37] Muntanga, Facebook.
[38] Muntanga, Facebook.
[39] Bizeck J. Phiri, "Gender and Politics: The Zambia National Women's Lobby Group in the 2001 Tripartite Elections," in *One Zambia, Many Histories, Towards a History of*

patriarchal culture, there are numerous reasons that account for women's tendency to be engaged in politics as mere supporters in post-independence Zambia such as a lack of resources and commitment.[40] Muntanga's contestation for the mayoral position therefore received attention not only because she was a Muslim, but also because she was a woman. Despite these debates, the rights of women to participate in politics regardless of their religious and political affiliation were provided for in the country's legal provisions, including the National Gender Policy.[41] Hence, Muntanga's participation in the elections signified the strides that had been made in the Zambian context to facilitate women's engagement in political leadership not merely as supporters of the male political candidates, but as contestants themselves.

The religious discourses in the media not only reflected the debates surrounding Muntanga's participation in the mayoral elections, but also signified how the media could be a platform for promoting Islamic literacy. By this, Muntanga's participation in the elections provided an avenue for correcting the misconceptions of Islam that were exhibited during the electoral campaigns in the public sphere. Despite democracy allowing more opportunities for women's participation in the political arena, the Internet and multiple media platforms provided increased opportunities to promote patriarchal religious and cultural beliefs.[42] In the Zambian context, the media platform created a space for women to assert themselves. For example, given the public misconceptions of women in *hijabs,* resulting in Muntanga being labelled as a member of Boko Haram and Al-shabaab, among other misleading terms, the Muslim community used the media to clarify why women wore a *hijab*: 'God has instructed women to wear it as a means of fulfilling His commandment for modesty. The women, wearing a *hijab* had a personal choice that was made after puberty and intended to reflect one's personal devotion

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Post-Colonial Zambia, eds. Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar and Giacomo Macola (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 259-74.

[40] Bertha Osei-Hwedie, "Women's Role in Post-Independence Zambian Politics," *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice 22,* no.2 (1998): 91-3.

[41] Office of the President, *National Gender Policy: Government of the Republic of Zambia* (Lusaka: Government Printers, 2000).

[42] Anthony M. Gunde, "Holy Symbols of Violence: New Media, Religious Rhetoric and Gendered Power Relations in Malawi," in *New Media and the Mediatisation of Religion: An African Perspective*, ed. Gabriel Faimau and William O. Lesitaokana (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 140.

to God.[43] These associations of Muslim women with the hijabs and terrorist activities has a long history.[44]

Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka also opened up avenues in which challenges of Muslim women were spelt out in the public media. A Muslim woman aspiring for leadership faced a double opposition, because some conservative factions within Muslim groups did not believe that a woman should be in a leadership role.[45] For Muntanga, the discrimination gave her a platform to tell people more about Islam, and she felt that if many Muslims would participate in elections, the discrimination would soon be a thing of the past,[46] signifying that her participation had both religious and political undertones. As concluded in other contexts, media representations of Muslim women had revealed a discrimination against women. For example, Muslim women were either disadvantaged through misrepresentative choices of images or silenced through a general lack of due prominence.[47] It must be noted that the "discrimination" reflected in Muntanga's public narrative was only tied to the discourses of the political campaigns, because Muslims and Christians have historically co-existed peacefully in Zambia.[48]

Muntanga's participation in the elections further ignited the question as to why people had to vote for a Muslim. Situated in the broader discourses of Zambia as a Christian nation, Muntanga used the media to highlight the Islamic virtues that would enable her to perform her mayoral functions:

> In terms of accountability, we Muslims believe that we will be judged for whatever we do in this world and in the hereafter; this has also been mentioned in the Quran that hearing and sight and the heart will be asked on the Day of Judgment. Every one of us is responsible and accountable for what we are in charge. Under my leadership as mayor, I expect that the directors, management and auditors of the council will perform their

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[43] Christine Chisha, "Who are these Women in Hijabs?" *Zambia Daily Mail*, 22 October 2017, http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/who-are-these-women-in-hijabs/.

[44] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2003).

[45] Muntanga, Facebook.

[46] Muntanga, Facebook.

[47] Al Jazeera News, "UK Media's Portrayal of Muslims 'Misleading and Negative:' Study." 9 July 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/uk-media-portrayal-muslims-misleading-negative-study-190708104550539.html.

[48] Taylor, *Culture and Customs*; Phiri, "Gender and Politics."

professional duties with the objective of satisfying the needs of the public and to God as well….[49]

These sentiments were backed by the notion that giving service to people was part of her Islamic faith.

Towards an Explanation of the Significance of a Muslim Woman's Contest for Mayor of Lusaka in the 2016 General Elections

While religion and the media discourses were often portrayed as intentional efforts by religious individuals and communities to use the media for religious purposes, the mediatisation accounts in the 2016 general elections were by and large ignited by a public search for answers on matters relating to Muslim women, gender, and politics. This signified the quest for knowledge on Islam in the public domain as well as women's struggles in political leadership, entrenched in religion and gender discourses. It can safely be argued that, while religion and the media were often linked, based on the development of new media technologies,[50] the Zambian context also confirmed that religion and the media could be linked through the quest for religious literacy as shaped by the religionisation of politics. For instance, by raising questions on whether a Muslim woman could engage in electoral politics, the teachings of Islam on the subject were brought to the fore, hence demonstrating how the media became a conduit for seeking religious clarifications and communicating religious messages. This also brought to the fore the religionisation of politics in which religion was used to garner support, and in turn created communities of religious dialogue through religious institutions and actors who spoke on religious matters pertaining to Muntanga's participation in the elections.

In addition, while Muntanga's contest revealed some form of religious illiteracy exhibited through name calling and searching for reasons why a Muslim woman deserved to be voted for, this also unveiled the literal understanding of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation which remained only a declaration because the individual rights and freedoms remained guaranteed in the country's constitution. Despite this, religion became part of the political campaigns in ways that reflected the two-

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[49] Muntanga, Facebook.
[50] Faimau and Lesitaokana, *New Media and Mediatisation of Religion*.

sided use of religion in politics (campaign and de-campaign) with messages that pointed to Christianity's legitimacy in leadership. For example, the campaign messages reflected the use of biblical names and verses and the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation to attract electorates especially at the presidential level. During the campaign, political rallies often commenced and closed with a prayer, depicting a form of public worship. Some campaigners were going to the extent of using "hallelujah-amen" as a rhetorical strategy to create rapport with the listeners, hence reducing religion to a political tool. It was therefore probable that this scenario of Christianised political campaigns raised the big question of Muslim participation in the elections. Hence the media became an avenue for wider publicity and clarification as part of the media's recognised role in the mediatisation theory.

Muntanga's contest for mayor further pointed to the broader use of religion in the context of political competition and the nature of the religionisation of politics. For example, while the questions that were raised could easily be associated with religious illiteracy, this portrayal could be deemed as part of the wider political nature of the 2016 general elections in which a contestant's religiosity was questioned and used as a basis for campaigning and de-campaigning others. For instance, at presidential level in which the major two contestants were Christians, the campaign messages in the media were not devoid of name-calling, including using labels like "Satanists."[51]

While a label like "Satanist" could easily be perceived as a pointer to religious illiteracy in the public sphere, they also underlined the nature of political religionisation anchored on attracting political support for oneself and de-campaigning other contestants in the 2016 general elections, in ways that could easily be associated with electoral campaigns serving political and religious agendas. This therefore contributes to explaining the use of the media by the selected members of the Muslim community to promote religious literacy on Islam, sparked off by labelling Muntanga and questioning her participation in the elections. As such, the media became a conduit for communicating religious ideas as underpinned by the mediatisation theory. The media also created a community of those advancing Islamic ideas in the context of the elections as Muntanga's participation in the elections became a basis for religious authorities,

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[51] Daily Nation Reporter, "I'm not a Satanist, Says HH," *Zambia Daily Nation*,1 April 2016, https://www.zambiadailynation.com/2016/04/01/im-not-a-satanistsays-hh/.

communities, or other representatives to purposely place information about religion in the media.[52] This signified the mediatisation theoretical position that points to the ways in which the media have become important sources of information about religious issues as well as tools for active engagement with religion.[53] For instance, Muntanga's Facebook posts that addressed ideas on Islam and gender from her perspective alongside the reviews and comments, created and shaped Islamic discourses in the campaign that allowed for the construction of religious identities among the Facebook users. This was by indirectly creating a virtual religious community in support of Muntanga's candidature in the elections. This resonated with the argument that online platforms like Facebook provide spaces for increasing levels of religious satisfaction among the followers of popular Christian preachers in Africa.[54]

Although Muntanga was not the winning candidate in the mayoral elections, her public engagement through the elections ultimately remained significant for contributing towards the exemplification of how the interaction and discourse of religion and the media were shaped by the context and different actors involved. Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka further added to announce the individual and collective contributions of Muslim women towards the visibility of Islam and development of the country. As was the case in Burkina Faso, Muslim women made contributions to the development of Islam through activism with associations, personal initiatives, religious studies, pilgrimages to Mecca, and media activities, and in turn used every opportunity to gain visibility and seek recognition of their religious legitimacy within their community.[55]

Based on how religion and politics interacted in the 2016 general elections and the consequent discrimination associated with Muntanga's participation as a Muslim woman in the media, the article argues that the

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[52] Kwame Asamoah-Gyadu, "Media Demonise African Religions," In Proceedings of 2011 Media Projects Conference: Journalism, Ethics and Religion. Accra, 24 June 2011.

[53] Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lovheim (eds.), *Mediatisation of Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[54] Motilola Akinfemisoye, "Type Amen and Share to Receive an Instant Miracle: Expanding the Frontiers of Religious Satisfaction Online in Africa," in *New Media and the Mediatisation of religion: An African Perspective*, eds. Gabriel Faimau and William O. Lesitaokana (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 123.

[55] Frederick Madore and Muriel Gomez-Perez, "Muslim Women in Burkina Faso since the 1970s: Towards Recognition as Figures of Religious Authority?" *Islamic Africa* 7, no.2 (2016): 185-209.

kind of politicking that could easily be associated with a lack of knowledge and appreciation of each other's religion, did not represent the wider recognised relationship between Muslims and Christians in Zambia who mutually co-existed as provided for in the country's constitution and a multi-religious society. The sound relationship was exhibited by the state's recognition of Muslim contributions to the nation in different historical periods. For example, the Lusaka Muslim Community Association was helping needy people across the country including the digging of boreholes so as to provide water and the distribution of relief food, blankets, and mosquito nets, among others.[56]

The relationship between Islam and Christianity further remained mutual in that religious ideas and practices of each religion were respected. For example, the Muslim community in Zambia recently hailed President Edgar Lungu for his solidarity with them during their month-long season of Ramadan that demonstrated a spirit of tolerance that existed in Zambia. During the month of Ramadan, the Makeni Islamic Society Trust that represented the larger Muslim Community in Zambia, acknowledged receipt of the public statements, social media posts, and personal messages wishing the Zambian Muslim community a blessed *Eid* – a gesture that affirmed the warm, tolerant, and cordial nature of the country.[57] As such, Zambia remains a country in which Muslims and Christians co-exist[58] and the Muslim contributions to the country's developmental agenda are recognised.

Conclusion

The article interrogated the interconnectedness of religion and the media through the exploration of the nature and significance of Sirre Muntanga's contest for mayor of Lusaka during the 2016 general elections in Zambia. Based on the mediatisation of religion and religionisation of politics, the article showed that Muntanga's contest for mayor signified how Muslims turn to the media to convey Islamic messages and how the interaction between religion and the media could not only be based on the availability of media technologies, but also on public demand for

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[56] Noah H. Abbaker, "Freedom of Worship in Zambia, Sudan," *Times of Zambia*, 4 April 2016, https://allafrica.com/stories/201604051627.html.

[57] Chris Phiri, "Muslims Hail Tolerant Zambian Spirit," *Zambia Reports*, 6 June 2019, 15, https://zambiareports.com/2019/06/06/muslims-hail-tolerant-zambian-spirit/.

[58] Mark Riedemann, "Islam in Zambia: Small and Notable," Interview with Fr. Felix Phiri, *Zenit*, 11 April 2011, https://zenit.org/articles/islam-in-zambia-small-and-notable/.

religious messages as shaped by the religionisation of politics. As a conduit for religious messages, the media were largely used to clarify Islamic ideas on Muslim participation in politics, thereby confirming the mediatisation theoretical position on the role of the media in the construction of religion in a contemporary society, including the ways in which the media have become important sources of information about religious issues as well as tools for an active engagement with religion. The article has therefore signified that the religion, gender, and media interface could also be shaped by different contexts and actors.

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Computing Cupid: Online Dating and the Faith of Romantic Algorithms

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ABSTRACT

The religious identity and preferences of daters increasingly constitute key data in algorithmic matchmaking processes, including religious dating sites. This article explores the implication of online dating algorithms for religious people looking for romantic relationships. The article demonstrates that, while religious dating sites reinforce heteronormativity, using narrow theologies and algorithms, the work they do on these sites further entrench these attitudes at much deeper, invisible, and ubiquitous levels. Using data from a study of more than 20 Christian dating websites and several sources of public discourses on online dating algorithms, this article shows that online dating sites centre their offerings around a particular interpretation of God's plans for romantic relationships. These sites also position their services and algorithms as mediators or facilitators of such plans. I argue that in mining user data, these dating sites mine culture with some of its biases and norms. Thus, users, algorithms, dating technologies, account settings, and the system designers co-create user experiences and the cultural outcome of user interactions with online dating technologies, including how these shape their core values and attitudes surrounding gender and sexuality.

KEYWORDS

religion; online dating; algorithms; romantic relationships; data; culture

Introduction

I: Listen, Google, both John and Paul are courting me. I like both of them, but in a different way, and it's so hard to make up my mind. Given everything you know, what do you advise me to do?

Google: Well, I know you from the day you were born. I have read all your e-mails, recorded all your phone calls, and know your favourite films, your DNA and the entire history of your heart. I have exact data about each date you went on, and if you want, I can show you second-by-second graphs of your heart rate, blood pressure and sugar levels whenever you went on a date with John or Paul. If necessary, I can even provide you with accurate mathematical ranking of every sexual encounter you had with either of them. And naturally enough, I know them as well as I know you. Based on all this information, on my superb algorithms, and on decades' worth of statistics about millions of relationships – I advise you to go with John, with an 87 percent probability of being more satisfied with him in the long run.

Indeed, I know you so well that I also know you don't like this answer. Paul is much more handsome than John, and because you give external appearances too much weight, you secretly wanted me to say, "Paul." Looks matter of course, but not as much as you think. Your biochemical algorithms – which evolved tens of thousands of years ago in the African savannah – give looks a weight of 35 percent in their overall rating of potential mates. My algorithms – which are based on the most up-to-date studies and statistics – say that looks have only a 14 percent impact on the long-term success of romantic relationships. So, even though I took Paul's looks into account, I still tell you that you would be better off with John.[1]

Yuval Harari, in this excerpt, aimed to illustrate the nature of the human-technology interaction in what he terms a "Dataist society," where algorithms are the new gods and data the new reality. The quote illustrates the abilities and all-knowing "power" of algorithms in a not-so-distant future that has already begun. While showing us what Google could do if we grant it the necessary access to data about our lives, for Harari, this also reflects the historical shift in authority and dependence from religion and God to humanism and its emphasis on individual preferences, feelings and desires, and to the growing reliance on algo-rithms to make key decisions about our lives, including our intimate and sexual relationships. Thus, algorithms could be trusted to provide more accurate and trustworthy suggestions about who to date or marry than a priest or our own personal values or feelings could ever provide. This is, arguably, an aspiration of the competitors in the online dating industry – to develop systems that know daters so well that they perfectly match them to their desired or right dates and possible long-term partners.

Online dating platforms and technologies have evolved significantly from personal advertising boards for singles to data-driven algorithmic systems that match and connect daters (romantic algorithms), as well as the human dating of chatbots and simulated realities. Online dating services are increasingly normalised as mediators in the process of finding romantic and marital relationships. The spiritual and religious identity and preferences of daters also constitute key data in some algorithmic matchmaking processes, alongside the growth in religious

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[1]   Yuval N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 337-8.

niche dating and those of groups that feel excluded by the algorithms of popular dating platforms.

This article explores online dating algorithms and religious niche dating platforms and their implications for religious ideas about romantic relationships. I will demonstrate that the websites that I have examined, reinforce and sustain heteronormative theologies about romance and marriage. This can be assessed from the content, appearance, and some of the settings of the websites which are visible and accessible. However, I aim to show that algorithms and the work they do on these sites make these reinforcements possible at a much deeper, invisible, and ubiquitous level. In the first part of the article I explain algorithms. I then discuss online dating algorithms and the ways in which they rely on different types of user data and collaborative filtering to influence romantic relationships, thereby reinforcing cultural norms about romantic relationships. The second part of the article focuses on the pitch of Christian dating websites in South Africa. In this part, I demonstrate how this is centred around certain interpretations of God's plans for romantic relationships as well as the positioning of online dating services and their sophisticated algorithms as mediators or facilitators of such plans. I argue that, in mining user data, these dating sites also mine culture with some of its biases and norms. Thus, users, algorithms, dating technologies, account settings, and the system designers co-create user experiences and the cultural outcome of user interactions with online dating technologies, including how these shape their core values and attitude around gender and sexuality.

Algorithms and the Work they Do

Online dating is only one aspect of contemporary life in which algorithms exert enormous influence. Algorithms are the quiet and opaque objects employed to process and turn into capital the massive data that are continually being generated from our digital life and practices.[2] Algorithms are a major force behind the fourth industrial revolution. Google search and ranking are among the most commonly known and used, but algorithms shape many of our online activities and determine what we interact with online. These include what search results we see on Google, what we see and interact with on social media news feeds,

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[2]   Luke Dormehl, *The Formula: How Algorithms Solve All Our Problems ‒ and Create More* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2015).

movie recommendations on Netflix, or products on Amazon or Takealot, Gmail's smart compose which uses machine learning to complete our sentences when we write e-mails or suggest replies, as well as Facebook's proximity algorithm's suggestions of whom we may want to be friends with, and what is generally visible online. Predictive algorithms are also increasingly used in different forms of governmentality, crime management, and major economic decisions in ways that engender several ethical and social questions.[3] As Rob Kitchin argues, algorithms appear to produce outcomes that disrupt and transform the organisation, operation, and labour of any domain on which they are deployed.[4] The impact of algorithms in the world is felt and experienced increasingly, but without adequate knowledge of what they are and how they work. Moreover, they are usually presented as "black-boxes" whose inner workings are incomprehensible.[5]

Technically, algorithms exist to solve problems through a series of instructions or steps, and in the most effective way.[6] A commonly used and helpful, but not entirely accurate, example of an algorithm is a recipe. When one follows the instructions in a recipe to prepare a particular meal, they are executing an algorithm which transforms raw ingredients into a specific product.[7] Thus, an algorithm (recipe) has been applied to solve a problem (how to efficiently produce a specific meal). According to Jeff Erickson, an algorithm is an "explicit, precise, unambi-guous, and mechanically-executable sequence of elementary instruc-tions, usually intended to accomplish a specific purpose."[8] Thus, algo-rithms are abstract mathematical procedures implemented or materialis-ed in programming languages and software. Software and digital technologies are primarily a composition of algorithms.[9] This results in machines being capable of executing very complex tasks in less time than humans, reduce labour, minimise errors and costs, and create new products and services in ways that would otherwise be impossible.[10]

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3   Daniel Neyland, *The Everyday Life of an Algorithm* (Cham: Springer, 2019).

4   Rob Kitchin, "Thinking Critically about and Researching Algorithms," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no.1 (2017): 14-29.

5   Neyland, *The Everyday Life of an Algorithm*.

6   Dormehl, *The Formula*.

7   Martin Erwig, *Once Upon an Algorithm: How Stories Explain Computing* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).

8   Jeff Erickson, *Algorithms* (Independently published, 2019), 1.

9   Kitchin, "Thinking Critically about and Researching Algorithms."

10   Kitchin, "Thinking Critically about and Researching Algorithms."

Yet, critical scholars increasingly seek to show that algorithms are not simply the formal, objective, reliable, abstract, and technical objects and procedures that technology companies and computer scientists claim them to be.[11] Even when programmers make deliberate efforts to be impartial, they cannot escape the influence of their local context, culture, and knowledge in the processes within which they are located and operate.[12] The choices and judgements they make, shape such algorithms. As Kitchin argues, algorithms are hardly created for any neutral purposes. They usually serve to create value and capital, to influence behaviour and preferences, and to identify, sort, and classify people.[13]

Algorithmic processes and production are located within several social, material, historical, and cultural processes. Thus, among the key issues that have concerned scholars about algorithms, include autonomy, agency, governmentality, the ability to acquire bias, sort, order, and classify people and content, make predictions that victimise groups, determine how people are judged and treated, and their apparent (social) power.[14] This power is both in the sense of a capacity to influence, shape, or produce certain effects (holding power), and in the Foucauldian sense of being part of social relations through which power is achieved and performed.[15] Despite these bugging questions, investigating algorithms to understand how they produce effects can be a very challenging task due to corporate and state secrecy, their opacity, their complex and cumbersome nature, and because of the communities and processes involved.[16]

Methodology

I employ a scavenging strategy which draws on different types of resources and clues to understand algorithms and circumvent some of

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[11] Ernest Davis, "Algorithms and Everyday Life," *Artificial Intelligence* 239 (2016): 1-6; David Beer, "The Social Power of Algorithms," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no.1 (2017): 1-13; Neyland, *The Everyday Life of an Algorithm*; Dormehl, *The Formula*; Louise Amoore, *Algorithmic Life: Calculative Devices in the Age of Big Data* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

[12] Kitchin, "Thinking Critically about and Researching Algorithms."

[13] Kitchin, "Thinking Critically about and Researching Algorithms."

[14] Neyland, *The Everyday Life of an Algorithm*; Kitchin, "Thinking Critically about and Researching Algorithms;" Beer, "The Social Power of Algorithms;" Nick Seaver, "Algorithms as Culture: Some Tactics for the Ethnography of Algorithmic Systems," *Big Data & Society* 4, no.2 (2017).

[15] Beer, "The Social Power of Algorithms;" Neyland, *The Everyday Life of an Algorithm*.

[16] Kitchin, "Thinking Critically about and Researching Algorithms."

the challenges in analysing an algorithm humanities scholar rather than a computer scientist. Nick Seaver's proposal of this strategy draws on the anthropological approach to culture as practice.[17] Partly as an attempt to address the representation of algorithms as inaccessible and therefore unknowable black boxes, Seaver suggests that we approach algorithms as "sociomaterial tangles" that are also engaged by users, including researchers. This suggestion is based on his argument that algorithms are more accessible if understood and approached *as* culture, rather than as aspects of, or objects *in* culture, because they function as and display characteristics of culture.[18] Thus, multiple approaches can be used to study them and how they function.

I analysed data from a previous study of more than 20 Christian dating sites in South Africa. While the study was intended to be on Pentecostalism, the websites did not self-describe as Pentecostal, as some were explicit about servicing born-again Christians of all denominations. This necessitated the use of the term "born-again" rather than "Pentecostal" as an inclusion criterion, since it was clear from these platforms that "born-again" was not narrowly defined as referring to Pentecostal Christians only, but to include other Christians. Moreover, while Pentecostal Christians would generally identify as born-again, not all who identify as born-again are Pentecostals. In Africa, evangelicals, some protestants, members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and interdenominational groups may also identify as born-again.[19] Thus, dating websites that targeted Christians that could generally be described as born-again (indicating a conversion or personal commitment to Christ as used among Pentecostal, evangelical, and other Christians) were prioritised. This further helped me to minimise a bias in website selection due to search engine ranking algorithms, based on unknown criteria and search engine optimisation, which often influence how search results are ranked and seen. Content analysis on the sites focused on selected pages, such as the home/landing page, about page, displayed profiles of users, and FAQ pages. These were archived to freeze them within a specific period, since website content can change. The content was manually and inductively coded and thematised with

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[17]   Seaver, "Algorithms as Culture."
[18]   Seaver, "Algorithms as Culture."
[19]   Kenneth R. Ross, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu and Todd M. Johnson (eds.), *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

the broad aim of finding what such sites promise/offer their clients and how they offer it.

To understand online dating algorithms, I relied primarily on a close reading of blogs published by insiders of dating companies, experts, interviews with online dating companies, relevant discussion threads, reviews of dating sites, their settings, FAQ pages, reports, instructions, and publicly accessible profiles. While the inner workings of key algorithms are closely guarded secrets, the gathered data offer some insights on how they work and shape the romantic relationships of users. Most of the content on these blogs are about algorithms and systems of dating sites and applications located in the United States and a few from Europe. Because they are the big competitors in the industry, they have received more media and critical attention, and thus have more publicly available information. Therefore, I used sites such as eHarmony, Tinder, and OkCupid as key examples. However, several of these sites operate internationally – Africa included – and their algorithms operate similarly across dating sites.

Romantic Algorithms

Online dating sites and apps offer three major services,[20] which are *access* (exposure to a large pool of potential partners, far more than is otherwise possible, and an opportunity to assess them against one's dating objectives), *communication* (different methods of computer-mediated communication to interact with potential partners before any face-to-face encounters), and *matching* (the utilisation of mathematical algorithms to find one's match and support the process of selecting a potential partner).[21] These services have fundamentally disrupted the traditional dating scene. Much of the earlier anxieties about online dating – privacy,[22] impression management, and deception[23] – do not limit the

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[20] Eli J. Finkel, Paul W. Eastwick, Benjamin R. Karney, Harry T. Reis and Susan Sprecher, "Online Dating: A Critical Analysis from the Perspective of Psychological Science," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 13, no.1 (2012): 3-66.

[21] Finkel *et al.*, "Online Dating."

[22] Camille Cobb and Tadayoshi Kohno, "How Public is My Private Life? Privacy in Online Dating," *WWW* (2017): 1231-40.

[23] Jeffrey T. Hancock, Catalina L. Toma and Nicole Ellison, "The Truth about Lying in Online Dating Profiles," in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (San José: ACM, 2007), 449-52; Catalina L. Toma, Jeffrey T. Hancock and Nicole B. Ellison, "Separating Fact from Fiction: An Examination of Deceptive Self-Presentation in Online Dating Profiles," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34, no.8 (2008): 1023-36; Jeffrey A. Hall, Namkee Park, Hayeon

mainstreaming of online dating. An online dater has access to a range of information about a potential partner within a few minutes, a process that could be much slower in offline connections.[24] Rather than slowly learning about the personality and character of a partner or rely on families and friends to assess compatibility over time, online dating algorithms can match daters within minutes.[25] Currently one can only speculate about the accuracy of such matching and the role that advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Arguments also exist about how, despite regular improvements to online dating experiences and technologies, it fails to match the experiential dimensions of offline dating.[26] As demonstrated in the quote at the beginning of this article, and as we increasingly experience the realms of governance and business in the fourth industrial revolution, increasingly smart algorithms are able to convert data into very revealing, insightful and predictive information about us, with increasing levels of accuracy. As with recommenders on Netflix, Facebook, or Amazon, dating technologies are getting better at knowing what users like and tailoring user experience along those lines. The central interest of this article is that daters rely on these matches and have made important romantic decisions based on them, with many "happy-endings" and "happily-ever-after" testimonies as found on the religious websites and on other platforms being studied. More importantly, through data mining strategies and collaborative filtering, these sites arguably contribute to sustaining and reproducing cultural norms about gender, romantic relationships, and related religious values.

"Data is King"

This is a very common expression in the current obsession with (Big) Data where power, capital, and imaginations of better futures are strongly tied to data and the capacity to manipulate data. Irrespective of the categorisation and strategies of online dating companies, their operations and services depend primarily on user data, whether self-reported or tracked behavioural data. I will discuss briefly how these data are mined and manipulated in order to demonstrate that, to a significant degree, algorithmic mechanisms and the objectives of the decision-

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Song and Michael J. Cody, "Strategic Misrepresentation in Online Dating: The Effects of Gender, Self-Monitoring, and Personality Traits," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 27, no.1 (2010): 117-35.

24 Finkel *et al.*, "Online Dating."
25 Finkel *et al.*, "Online Dating."
26 Finkel *et al.*, "Online Dating."

makers behind them shape and sustain gender and relationship norms and practices.

Online dating sites generally fall into two categories in terms of how they collate and use information about users.[27] The first category includes survey-using sites such as Match.com, OkCupid, and eHarmony which make use of personality questionnaires and essay fields to develop rich data and profiles about registered users. Such data are used to calculate compatibility and pair users. Several other types of information are collected by some services. For example, Horozo additionally uses tarot readings, Pythagoras Squire Psychomatrix, fortune cookies, Natal Chart, lucky numbers, and other astrological elements to match singles.[28] In the case of the dating app, Once, human matchmakers work on user profiles and behavioural information to recommend the next date from the Once database.[29] The second category of dating platforms asks users during registration to link their dating accounts to their social media accounts. Examples include Tinder, Hinge, and Bumble. Daters' social media profiles and information – Facebook friends and likes, Instagram photos, and artists on Spotify – are used to suggest potential partners. In 2016, Once announced that users could sync their Fitbit and Android Wear devices to their dating profile, allowing them to track heartrates.[30] When a user comes across someone they find attractive or see the day's match, they could see their own reaction in real-time heartrates, and in future updates, be able to share heartrate information with the match.

This dynamic data embody and represent who we are, as well as our values and culture, because we arguably supply aspects of ourselves including our religion and culture to such sites – whether we do so deliberately, passively, or actively. This then raises the question of what happens to the selves users supply, to what extent they are altered, and how they return to inform who we are and what our cultures are. It is also important that the cultural context of the technologies and their designers as well as their preferences and interpretation of the needs of users

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[27] Dale Markowitz, "The Future of Online Dating Is Unsexy and Brutally Effective," *Gizmodo*, 2017, https://gizmodo.com/the-future-of-online-dating-is-unsexy-and-brutally-effe-1819781116.

[28] Horozo. "Create Serious Relationship," *Horozo.com*, 2019, https://www.horozo.com/.

[29] Jordan Crook, "Dating App Once Uses Your Heart Rate To Help You Find Love," *TechCrunch*, 2016, http://social.techcrunch.com/2016/01/14/dating-app-once-uses-your-heart-rate-to-help-you-find-love/.

[30] Crook, "Dating App."

shape the outcome. For example, eHarmony does not only collect personality, age, location, sexual, religious, and spiritual information, it sets its systems to ignore users' choices, unless such users choose extreme points on the scales that are used to measure their preferences around race, religion, and other variables.[31]

While Tinder claims not to believe in stereotypes and therefore does not take race, income, or religion into consideration,[32] it is difficult to see how its algorithms can avoid reproducing prejudices. Moreover, as data from sites such as OkCupid have shown, dating sites consider behavioural data to be more insightful and reliable than self-reported information, partly because singles get invested in presenting favourable images of themselves. For example, OkCupid data, in a 2010 post, showed that male users spend a significant amount of time and energy going after the youngest women in their preference pool – women younger than the minimum age that they state in their profiles – while neglecting women only a few years older than them.[33] Women, on the other hand, are more open to dating both reasonably younger and older men. Added to this, users often say that race does not matter, however, their actions show racial preferences.[34] In 2014, OkCupid reported that, while Black men showed little preferences based on race, non-Black men were less likely to converse with Black women. Additionally, all women preferred men belonging to their own race, but otherwise were less likely to initiate conversations with Black or Asian men.[35] Thus, by focusing on behaviour, algorithms can learn and identify nuanced preferences and values to improve their systems. However, there is hardly any indication that challenging the gender and cultural prejudices manifested in some of these observed behaviours, is a consideration when dating services use such data to improve their systems. It seems to be more about

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[31] Sarah Knapton, "Secret of eHarmony Algorithm Is Revealed...," *The Telegraph*, 2017, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/05/14/secret-eharmony-algorithm-ignoring-wishes-picky-daters/.

[32] Tinder, "Powering Tinder® ─ The Method Behind Our Matching," *Blog Gotinder*, 2019, https://blog.gotinder.com/powering-tinder-r-the-method-behind-our-matching/.

[33] OkCupid, "The Case For An Older Woman," *The Blog, OkCupid*, 2019, https://theblog.okcupid.com/the-case-for-an-older-woman-99d8cabacdf5.

[34] OkCupid, "The Big Lies People Tell In Online Dating," *The Blog, OkCupid*, 2010, https://theblog.okcupid.com/the-big-lies-people-tell-in-online-dating-a9e3990d6ae2; Markowitz, "The Future of Online Dating;" OkCupid, "The Case For An Older Woman."

[35] OkCupid, "Race and Attraction, 2009-2014: What's changed in five years?," *The Blog, OkCupid*, 2014, https://theblog.okcupid.com/race-and-attraction-2009-2014-107dcbb4f060.

efficiency in giving singles tailor-made solutions to what they are believed to desire. Thus, if the cultures, preferences, and values absorbed by these systems are patriarchal – which often appears to be the case – the outcome becomes a more efficient patriarchy, and data remain "King."

Collaborative Filtering and Digital Cages

This is worsened by the fact that recommenders tend to close in and narrowly confine user interaction to a small group defined according to racial, physical, religious, and other user information, preferences, and behaviour – which is not always the result of careful thought or decision on the part of the user. To some degree, recommenders merely accentuate what might be common offline behaviour in terms of how people are likely to seek or find romantic relationships. This may involve looking within one's geographical locations, family, and friend networks, that communities and other groupings within which they already belong, have reasonable proximity or encounters, and/or enjoy cultural approval. However, a critical question that dating algorithms evoke, is the extent to which they reinforce prejudice and bias, shape perception and social interaction within and beyond the immediate dating context, and govern user exposure to alternatives. Ben Berman attempted to demonstrate such bias by building a dating game called Monster Match funded by the tech company, Mozilla.[36] In Monster Match, a user creates a profile by choosing from a cast of monsters and swipes to match and set dates with other monsters.[37] The game shows how one's "field of choice" becomes narrower as they swipe left or right to indicate dislike or like. The chance of being seen is reduced for every profile swiped left and one ends up seeing the same set of monsters repeatedly. Thus, Berman argues that these algorithms trap users in a cage created by their own preferences.[38]

Berman also demonstrates how collaborative filtering works to exclude individuals and groups in online dating. Used by several dating platforms, collaborative filtering is a way of making recommendations based partly on a user's preferences and partly on popularity among other users. To illustrate with an example from Wired's report on Ber-

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[36] Ariel Pardes, "This Dating App Exposes the Monstrous Bias of Algorithms," *Wired*, 2019, https://www.wired.com/story/monster-match-dating-app/.
[37] Pardes, "This Dating App Exposes the Monstrous Bias of Algorithms."
[38] Pardes, "This Dating App Exposes the Monstrous Bias of Algorithms."

man's experiment, "if you swipe right on a zombie and left on a vampire, then a new user who also swipes yes on a zombie won't see the vampire in their queue."[39] Thus, certain profiles get excluded based on popular practice. Berman notes that the failure of collective filtering is evident in the rapid growth of niche dating, as many minorities feel excluded in the popular online dating scene. Niche dating sites range from those based on occupation, body type, sexual orientation, and community, to those based on ideology, religious affiliation, spirituality, and ethnicity.[40] These dating sites also rely on user data, use the same or similar technologies, and make the same promises as the major platforms, only within the limits of their niches and to cater for more clearly defined groups. Religious dating sites particularly draw on religious ideas, sentiments, and belonging to attract singles. Thus, they also arguably reinforce certain ideas about romantic relationships and confine users within preferences partly defined by the offerings of the platforms and user data. I will now discuss Christian dating sites more specifically in terms of what they pitch to users, how they position themselves in relation to the theologies behind their offering, and what the implication might be in light of the preceding discussion of algorithms.

Matches Made in Heaven

Many religions strive to direct and regulate the sexuality of their members.[41] Sylvia Tamale argued that intersecting with law and reinter-pretations of traditional customs and religions, instrumentalise, regulate, and control sexualities, especially women's.[42] Religions provide several algorithms – rules, doctrines, and processes – to ensure that romantic relationships are practiced within an acceptable religious framework. These teachings are based on what is constructed or believed to be God's intention, commands, or desire. In one of the earlier works that explored the relationship between religion and digital media, Brenda Brasher argues that the Internet and communication technologies are shaping the ways in which religious people and communities interact and

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[39] Pardes, "This Dating App Exposes the Monstrous Bias of Algorithms."
[40] Niche Dating Sites Reviews, "Dating Sites that fit your needs," *DatingScout*, 2019, //www.datingscout.com/niche-dating.
[41] Stephen Ellingson and M. Christian Green, *Religion and Sexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (London, New York: Routledge, 2014).
[42] Sylvia Tamale, "Exploring the Contours of African Sexualities: Religion, Law and Power," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14, no.1 (2014): 150-77.

select spouses.[43] Religious dating sites are a manifestation of this change. Research on the motives behind online dating among religious people is scarce. However, a study among Muslim American women suggests that religious people use online dating technologies to navigate the mate selection landscape for several other reasons than the usual online daters.[44] Muslim American women, for example, use such services because they have a limited access to traditional religious communities and networks where they can meet other singles. Online dating also gives them some control over their self-presentation, interaction, and dating practice, as well as some privacy and confidentiality.[45] The study shows that in their use of online dating services, Muslim women also strive to find a balance between the affordances of these sites and their desire to maintain their religious and cultural values and practices around courtship and romantic relationships.[46] This is an indication that religious daters, like others, approach online dating with some clarity about what they want and this is likely to be shaped by their religious and cultural values and preferences.

Many online daters consider it important to include information about their religious or non-religious status in their dating profiles in the hope of finding compatible partners.[47] Some dating sites show a considerable sensitivity to the religious preferences of their users and attempt to cater for them. eHarmony, for example, in its guidelines for the religion settings on user accounts, expresses an awareness that religion can be deeply personal and diverse, and acknowledges that their settings system is unable to simply categorise or include "every nuanced shade in the spectrum."[48] While the settings allow users to "define" themselves religiously, and the matches they hope for, eHarmony advises users –

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[43] Brenda E. Brasher, *Give Me That Online Religion* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2001).

[44] Annisa M.P. Rochadiat, Stephanie T. Tong and Julie M. Novak, "Online Dating and Courtship among Muslim American Women: Negotiating Technology, Religious Identity, and Culture," *New Media & Society* 20, no.4 (2018): 1618-39.

[45] Rochadiat *et al*., "Online Dating and Courtship."

[46] Rochadiat *et al*., "Online Dating and Courtship."

[47] Religion, "Online Dating Gets Religion: Spiritual Profile Crucial To Many Seeking Romance," HuffPost, 2012, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/religious-romance-require_n_1270558.

[48] eHarmony Staff, "eHarmony Religion Settings: The How-To Manual," *Love & Harmony*, 2019, https://www.eharmony.com/dating-advice/using-eharmony/eharmony-religion-settings-the-how-to-manual/.

for the sake of optimising their experience – to ignore personal definitions of religions and use the categories provided.[49]

It is clear from these sites that, while they attempt to accommodate religious preferences, they also get deeply involved in determining how these preferences are portrayed and represented online. A dater's religious data and the religious profile of their desired partner becomes a product co-created by the user, the settings, and the designers of the dating system. This is also the case with religious niche dating sites. However, some of them make a specific faith or denomination the primary focus and community of their dating pool, which could reduce the extent to which daters' religion are co-designed online, since the level of ambiguity may have been reduced.

"God-intended" Romance and its Facilitators

The dating sites analysed in my research generally targeted born-again Christians and employed different strategies to portray themselves as safe nests for Christians, where Christian values are protected in an online dating world that is rife with vice. This is probably an appeal to the belief among some Christians that the Internet is infested with demonic principalities and powers and a spiritual danger to the undiscerning Christian user.[50] Users also tend to respond in their profile essays by stating their born-again or similar Christian status. For example, Thando,[51] on one of these profiles, writes:

> I am a born again Christian enjoying a fulfilling journey with Jesus and have done so since…Jesus at the center of my life, is how I choose to live and as such I am in fellowship regularly as this feeds my soul and transforms me in the likeness of Jesus. I would like to…share God-adventures with a man who loves Jesus.

The sites present themselves as imbued with Christian values and as environments that are agreeable to Christians. The ultimate pitch of

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[49]   eHarmony Staff, "eHarmony Religion Settings."
[50]   Jana M. Bennett, *Aquinas on the Web? Doing Theology in an Internet Age* (New York: T & T Clark, 2012).
[51]   When citing examples from personal profiles, I use pseudonyms and anonymise the website. Online content is dynamic and constantly changes, including the structures and designs of websites and user-provided data. Thus, the Christian dating sites data used here were archived between January and June 2018.

born-again dating services is best captured in the following lines selected from the landing page of Christian Match:[52]

> Let us help you find a Match made in Heaven! We provide a secure environment where you will be able to meet like-minded Christian Singles in your area, who share your love of God and are committed to Jesus Christ and the Word of God. You could meet your soul mate, and have a lasting relationship that is truly blessed in the eyes of the Lord. True love that is blessed is possible.

Besides giving hope to Christian singles that their desired partners are within reach, these sites also reflect the commonly held belief that each Christian single has a partner prepared for them by God ("made in heaven") and only needs to find or have that person revealed to them. These services often emphasise that their "sophisticated" algorithms are able to assist with this process. The use of algorithms and other tools to generate matches does not seem to contradict or exclude the idea of a match made in heaven. For these services, dating technologies may be interpreted as tools that enable them to facilitate God's plan for singles in terms of dating. These Christian dating services also appear to under-stand the importance for many Christians of an identity forged around the personality of and belief in Christ and what that demands. Thus, some of them encourage users to make Jesus the centre of their lives and their relationships and find partners who do the same.

Another site describes "the sort of love God intended,"[53] and which can be found through their services, as one based on faith and commitment, and with singles who share the same core Christian values. Besides implying that they understand and know the types of union intended by God and are mediators or missionaries, in a way of such love, these services contribute in defining for their users what God's intended relationship means. Such interpretations can sometimes be narrow and exclusive. For example, the above definition excludes interfaith marriages and may further exclude interdenominational marriages depending on how much they differ on their understanding of God's intention. Like other ideas on the platforms, such exclusions are supported with certain interpretations of scripture, like the following

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[52] Christian Match, "Why Choose Christian Match for Christian Dating," 2018, www.christianmatch.co.za.

[53] Christian Dating, "Have Faith in Love," *EliteSingles*, 2019, www.elitesingles.co.za/christian-dating.

example of a passage from the Bible: "Believers, do not be teamed or yoked with unbelievers, for what do the people of God have in common with unbelievers…How can light live with darkness?...How can a believer live in harmony with a non-believer…How can a Christian be a partner with one who does not believe?" (2 Cor 6:14-15; Living Bible).

The choice of Bible version and the heavily religious nature of a website may suggest that interreligious marriages are not considered to be approved by God. Thus, these sites can be viewed as playing a critical role in fashioning and sustaining certain interpretations as the ideal for Christian relationships.

Another key aspect of the vision of relationship intended by God is its resulting in marriage. While some of these sites do not explicitly mention marriage as a goal, they sometimes imply it in their use of "lasting commitment" and similar terms. There is also no indication on any site that God could intend a romantic relationship that does not end in a lifelong commitment, although friendship is among the outcomes promised on some of the sites. Nonetheless, some of them explicitly name marriage as their ultimate goal and use the term "marriage-minded" Christians to further define their targeted singles. This also suggests an implicit acknowledgement that some singles are not seeking marriage, but emphasise, as CWed did, that marriage is part of God's plan for Christians.[54]

It was insightful to observe the "loud" silences on these sites about same-sex marriages or relationships, both in textual content and visual representations, making their theologies to emerge as heteronormative. First, most of them only offer two options – male or female – as the gender of the potential partner sought by a user. For example, the first field to be completed by a potential user on Christian Match begins with "I am a" and requires the potential user to complete the statement by selecting either "man looking for a woman" or "woman looking for a man."[55] No other option is provided in the drop-down list and no blank field is provided for potential users to type in other preferences during registration. Same-sex singles cannot use this service to find partners irrespective of their born-again Christian status. It either assumes that

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[54] CWed, "Where Christian Singles Meet," *South Africa's Marriage Minded Christian Dating Service*, 2018, www.cwed.co.za.

[55] Christian Match, "Why Choose Christian Match for Christian Dating."

same-sex singles are not truly born-again, or deliberately aims to keep them out. Sites that cater for a broader population of singles, but have sections for Christians, such as Elite Singles,[56] are likely to allow users to select singles of their own gender during registration. For example, I was able to select the male symbol as my gender identity and the same symbol for the partner I am looking for during the initial stage of experimental registration at Elite Singles. Nonetheless, other types of visible information on the Christian section make this flexibility disappear.

Second, the testimonies and success stories on the sites being examined, whether in video or text-image formats, only show happy and intimate-looking heterosexual, often white couples, smiling, looking each other in the eyes, noses touching, men carrying women on their back by the sea, and so on. In light of the religious nature of the offers of these websites, such imagery and stories could signal to potential users that a marriage between a man and woman is the only type intended by God. The potential impact of this suggestion can be further appreciated when the special place that testimonies occupy in the spiritual life of many Christian communities is considered. For Christians, testimonies reaffirm faith and spirituality, they provide evidence of what is believed and of God's work in the believer's life; it shows the world the character and abilities of the Christian's God.[57] Thus, testimonies of successful online born-again dating are capable of having a deep significance for Christian singles, keeping them hopeful and increasing their confidence in online born-again dating services. However, their dominant narratives in the testimonies may wrongly suggest that only certain types of couples are approved by God, and their experiences ought to resemble such narratives to be a sign of God's blessing.

Reproduction of Culture

At this point, it serves to reiterate that the earlier discussion about algorithms, the work that they are doing, and the specific working of online dating algorithms and systems to reinforce culture, govern exposure, and shape preferences and values, also apply to the Christian dating sites I have discussed. These sites rely on the same or similar

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[56] Christian Dating, "Have Faith in Love."
[57] Scott A. Ellington, "History, Story, and Testimony: Locating Truth in a Pentecostal Hermeneutic," *Pneuma* 23, no.1 (2001): 245-63; Meredith B. McGuire, "Testimony as a Commitment Mechanism in Catholic Pentecostal Prayer Groups," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 16, no.2 (1977): 165-8.

systems and logics to target a more streamlined clientele. Thus, they are not free of the concerns generally raised about algorithms and their designers. They are also products of specific cultures, priorities, and modes of interpreting the world. Therefore, the theologies and heteronormative ideas advanced through the content and imagery of religious dating sites may be further entrenched through algorithmic processes in digital culture, while filtering ensures that users' exposure to alternatives is consistently narrowed.

This is magnified by the fact that cookies and other online behavioural tracking and data mining tools make it possible for data from one's activity on a single website to inform what is made visible to them on another site. Searching for some relationship advice on Google, only to be flooded with tailored adverts of relationship products on one's Facebook account, on online store, or through phone calls and e-mails from advertisers, is an experience familiar to many. Thus, the control of a user's field of choice and the type of cultural messages one is exposed and limited to on online dating platforms, likely follow them to other platforms.

It is not my intention in the present study to undermine the massive potential for improving life conditions and wellbeing in digital technologies and platforms. Advances in artificial intelligence and data science often signal progress, even on epistemological level. However, their ability to reinforce worldviews that contribute to the exclusion of people based on religion, gender, or sexual orientation, is an indication of how they cannot be separated from the values and practices of the cultures and people from which they emerge. Thus, if such cultures have harmful norms around gender and sexualities, these technologies are very likely to reproduce them. If online dating sites mine the culture of users through data, primarily to better service themselves and make profit, then they are likely to only reproduce more efficient versions of such culture. Moreover, as I have suggested, there is a co-creation of religion and values in the process of user interaction with online dating platforms. This happens from the moment of registration when users apply some predefined values to define their religious belonging, values, and preferences, as well as those of their desired partners. It also continues in the different encounters, redefinitions, and exposures that users experience while participating in the dating process which sometimes extend outside the dating platforms with several dates and interactions with different people. How these experiences shape the

dater is no longer a matter of their own choice alone or their self-reported data. The religious and cultural values that they acquire in the process, and the effect that it produces on their gender preferences and practices, are ultimately a product of their interaction with technologies.

Conclusion

Online dating platforms are obviously very useful developments for many people. However, the technical systems and processes on which they depend, invite critical inquiry. There is a growing awareness that these technologies have more consequences for social interaction and the economy than their appearance as simple technical objects that make life better would convey. Advancements in machine learning increase the chances of accuracy in predictions, while the linking of one's dating profile to social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, provides broader data for such accurate predictions. However, the question of algorithmic bias and influence remains a crucial one as far as the role of religion in social interaction is concerned, including the realm of romantic love and relationships.

The sites discussed in this article are not necessarily representative of the hundreds of religious niche dating platforms available, some of which have shorter lifespans than others. However, they offer relevant insight on the dynamics of technology, religion, culture, and some of the ways that these intersect to reproduce and sustain patriarchy and hetero-normativity. Thus, algorithms and interface systems that aim to make their operations and influence on users and society invisible,[58] need some close investigation to understand the ways in which oppressive and dehumanising norms are sustained in less obvious ways. This will contribute towards critical research on algorithms and the efforts to influence the design of more humane and ethical artificial intelligence.

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[58]   Grant D. Bollmer, *Theorizing Digital Cultures* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018).

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Uyajola 9/9 uTata'kho: Missionaries and Black Masculinities

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ABSTRACT
This article argues that contemporary Black masculinities in South Africa have been shaped, in various ways, by nineteenth-century missionary depictions of masculinity. Furthermore, yesteryear depictions by missionaries problematised Black masculinities and portrayed African men as uncivilised brutes with no sense of morality. The article presents an assessment of contemporary depictions of Black men on the DSTV shows, *Uyajola 9/9* and *uTata'kho*, in relation to missionary depictions of Black men. Anchored in decolonial thought, this analysis seeks to unpack the problematised Black masculinities that were reinvented in mass media.

Introduction

The Black man's body has been the subject of fascination and research within European scholarship since the seventeenth century. The European world came to know of Africa through the writings of explorers and missionaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The accounts of explorers and missionaries, with their inherent distortions of Black people and their cultures have had a significant impact on African historiography and the self-consciousness of Black Africans.[1] Christian missionaries depicted Black men as a problem that needed the remedy of Christian civilisation. Hence, scholars like Ratele call for an African situated psychology of men and boys that locates Black African men within their proper social, economic, and political realities and experiences.[2] Ratele contends that contemporary studies in masculinities reproduce "colonial and alienating notions of Africa and Black African boys, men and masculinities."[3]

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[1] Ali A. Mazrui, "European Explorations and Africa's Self-discovery," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 7, no.4 (1969): 665-8.
[2] Kopano Ratele, "African (situated) psychologies of boys, men and masculinities," *Psychology in Society* 54, no.10 (2017): 10-28.
[3] Ratele, "African (situated) Psychologies," 12.

It was inherent in the missionary ideology that "savage" Black men could only be saved from their savagery through "sound Christian instruction." Thus, their "heathen institutions" became a prime target for missionary work.[4] Within the body of knowledge on Black masculinities, there is a problematisation of manhood, with a focus on researching Black men's practices in order to change them.[5] A critical engagement on masculinities has been driven by the contextual African realities of the HIV pandemic and its nexus with gender-based violence.[6] Men's studies, as a field, have realised the value of working with men and boys. Black men and their masculine practices have been presented as a problem that must be transformed in light of HIV and gender-based violence in South Africa. The purpose of the article is to critically reflect on the ways in which Christian missionaries of the nineteenth century depicted Black African men and how the media shows, *Uyajola 9/9* and *uTatakho*, continue to reproduce these depictions.

Maluleke contends that religion, and its relation to masculinities, is constantly (re)mediated through media platforms.[7] In his view, "sacred texts" are not only to be found in the Bible or Quran, but laced across various media, including television. Given the absence of phenomenological studies on masculinities and their connection to religion, the focus on *Uyajola* 9/9 and *uTatakho* presents the opportunity to better understand the complexities of African masculinities. The phrase "uyajola uTatakho" is a play on words referring to two television programmes – *Uyajola 9/9* and *uTatakho* – that have captured the imaginations of many South Africans. Loosely translated, it means "your father is having an affair." The television shows are aired on the subscription-based

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[4] Mazrui, "European Explorations," 671. Heathen institutions were the practices and customs of Black people that missionaries classified as being of pagan origin and at odds with what they considered as being sound Christian teachings. Such practices include African Rainmaking, Lobola, and Manhood and Womanhood rituals of initiation.

[5] Kopano Ratele, "Studying Men in Africa Critically," in *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Egodi Uchendu (Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2008), 31; Ezra Chitando, "Religion and Masculinities in Africa: Opportunities for Africanization" in *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies: Essays in Honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona*, eds. Afe Odegame, Ezra Chitando and Bolaji Bateye (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 137; Kopano Ratele, "Of what Value is Feminism to Men?" *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* 39, no.2 (2013): 256.

[6] Chitando, "Religion and Masculinities," 137.

[7] Tinyiko Maluleke, "Of Wounded Killers and 'failed men:' Broadening the Quest for Liberating African Masculinities," *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 24, no.1 (2018): 46-9.

channels of DSTV, Mzansi Magic and Moja Love, respectively. Both shows fall within the genre of reality television and are said to be mirroring the realities of ordinary people. The central motifs of the two shows are on paternity disputes and sexual promiscuity.

This article juxtaposes the depictions of Black men in the nineteenth-century South African missionary discourses against the depictions of Black men on the television shows, *uTatakho* and *Uyajola 9/9*. Through this juxtaposition two notions emerge: first, the missionary ideology defined Black masculinities, based on stereotypes that originated in the European imagination, while Black masculinities were thought of as a social problem; second, both shows depict Black men as irresponsible hypersexual beings. This analysis is grounded in the decolonial thought and contributes to ideas of creating more nuanced depictions of Black men in the South African media, beyond the stereotypical projection of these men. Depictions of Black men that recognise the multiplicity of factors that have shaped Black masculine subjectivities, enable narratives of Black men that go beyond their stereotypical images and masculinities.

The discussion starts with a brief exploration of decolonial thought and its relation to masculinities in Africa. Following that, it unpacks the South African missionary depictions of African cultural practices of polygamy and circumcision, as well as the implications of a missionary ideology on Black masculinities. The article turns to address the depiction of Black men on the television shows that serves as its case study and provides the context for the juxtaposition that is central to this article. Last, a reflection on the notion that decolonial thought can assist in delinking Black masculinities from colonial depictions of Black men in South Africa, is presented.

Decoloniality and Masculinities

Colonialism defined Black men as savage brutes and problematised their male dress code, marriage customs, and manhood rites of passage. Missionaries in South Africa sought to civilise them by abolishing practices that they considered as heathen institutions. Studies of Black men were not premised on understanding them in their social, economic, and political contexts, but on changing their customs to fit European standards. Ethnographic studies on Black men were not concerned with the social, political, and economic contexts out of which Black masculine practices emerged. Black masculinities continued to be problematised

and presented as needing transformation, while they have not been understood in light of the socio-economic factors that produced them. This can also be called the "villainisation of black men."[8] A "delinking" from such epistemological traditions offers one the opportunity to understand Black masculinities that are centred on the lived realities of Black men.[9] In this context, delinking can be understood as a process of moving away from the epistemic assumptions that are found in all areas of knowledge established in the Western world.

Decolonial thought can be summarised as being a radical anti-systemic intellectual, political, and ethical movement that rejects all forms of fundamentalism.[10] Ndlovu-Gatsheni isolates three components of decolonial thought, namely "coloniality of power," "coloniality of being," and "coloniality of knowledge."[11] Coloniality of power analyses the skewed global power patterns that stem from European colonialism.[12] "Coloniality of being" focuses on the systematic denial of the humanity of the targets of colonialism, while "coloniality of knowledge" challenges the systematic repression of ideas, beliefs, and images of colonised people.[13] It is helpful to understand the idea of coloniality as "the patterns of power that emerged from colonialism, but continue to define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond colonialism."[14] It is "a power structure and epistemological design that perpetuates skewed global power relations, while claiming the universality of Euro-Northern epistemologies."[15] Ultimately, decolonial thought is a "process of ontological restoration of enslaved, colonised and exploited peoples, and aims to recognise the epistemologies that coloniality

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8   Refiloe Makama, Rebecca Helman, Neziswa Titi and Sarah Day, "The Danger of a Single Feminist Narrative: African-centred Decolonial Feminism for Black Men," *Agenda* (2019): 3.

9   Cf. Walter D. Mignolo, "DELINKING," *Cultural Studies* 21, no.2-3 (2007): 449-514.

10   Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Metaphysical Empire, Linguicides and Cultural Imperialism," *English Academy* Review 35, no.2 (2018): 98.

11   Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Metaphysical Empire," 103-7.

12   Walter, D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (London: Duke University Press, 2012); Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Metaphysical Empire," 103-7.

13   Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Towards the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, no.2-3 (2007): 251-7; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Metaphysical Empire," 103-7.

14   Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," 247.

15   Sabelo, J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Decoloniality in Africa: A Continuing Search for a New World Order," *Australasian Review of African Studies* 36, no.2 (2015): 31.

deemed non-existent."[16] Such an epistemological stance gives recognition to the existence of marginalised masculinities such as Black masculinities, and enables Black men to theorise about their own lived realities, as opposed to fulfilling a mandate of coloniality.

A central notion in the "coloniality of being" is the "Manichean misanthropic scepticism," addressing the very being of colonised people.[17] It doubts their humanity and frees the Western world from acknowledging the violence that coloniality has inflicted on the colonised people. Robert Moffat asserts that "we have known beings so low a grade, that at one time it was seriously questioned whether they belong to the human family."[18] Moffat's assertions highlight the inherent Manichean misanthropic scepticism in the nineteenth-century South African missionary thinking. If the colonised people are not human, then they are excluded from the fundamental rights of human beings. The implication of the Manichean misanthropic scepticism on Black masculinities is best described by Bell Hooks when she argues:

> Racist sexist iconography in Western culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depicted black males as uncivilized brutes without the capacity to feel complex emotions or the ability to experience either fear or remorse. According to racist ideology, white-supremacist subjugation of the black male was deemed necessary to contain the dehumanized beast. This perspective allowed racist folks to engage in extreme psychological denial when it came to assuming accountability for their ruthless and brutal dehumanization of black men. [19]

The Western knowledge production has therefore defined Black masculinities and their depictions. Colonialism defined the boundaries of Black masculinities in order to fulfil its colonial mandate. Mamdani asserts that "the settler defined and pinned the native."[20] Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ethnographic research laid the foundation for African subjectivities and consequently outlined the shape of Black masculinities

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[16]   Siyabulela Tonono, "Crafting a Decolonial Economic Order for Re-Afrikanisation in the Context of South Africa," *Africanus: Journal of Development Studies* 48, no.1 (2018): 3.
[17]   Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," 245.
[18]   Robert Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (New York: Thomas Carter, 1843), 148.
[19]   Bell Hooks, *We Real Cool: Black men and Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 44.
[20]   Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 30.

in Africa.[21] The thrust behind the ethnographic research was premised on collecting evidence to back up what Europeans regarded as "disparities between civilised and enlightened Europe and the barbaric and dark continent of Africa."[22] Wesleyan missionary, William Shaw,[23] described and defined the Xhosa society as follows:

> The whole native population on the coast is separated into several large divisions which may be called "nations." Each of these nations is again subdivided into bodies of people, which may be called "tribes" and these again into yet smaller divisions, that may be appropriately called "clans." Now every nation, and every tribe of each nation, and every clan of each tribe, has its own distinctive name.

The European knowledge production was characterised by ethno-centrism from which a fixation emerged with the tribe as the basis of social identity in the African society. Missionaries were central in undermining the ontology of Black people through their civilising efforts.[24] Post-apartheid South Africa has continued to recognise and entrench the same colonial tribal categories and it is in the retribalisation of the contemporary South Africa that all South African Black men have been depicted as "rampant, warrior-like, heterosexuals."[25]

Among the structural nodes of coloniality is a "global gender/sex hierarchy that privileges males over females and European patriarchy over other forms of gender configurations and sexual relations."[26] Decolonial thought is a response to the oppressive European ideals that have been cast on non-Europeans emerging from coloniality. It is an attempt by the non-existent world to "free itself from the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment."[27] Decolonial thought recognises that coloniality was not only racialised, but

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[21] Mamdani, *Define and Rule,* 55.
[22] Egodi Uchendu, "Are African Males Men? Sketching African Masculinities," in *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Egodi Uchendu (Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2008), 2.
[23] William Shaw, *Story of my Missions in South-Eastern Africa* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1860), 397.
[24] Chabani N. Manganyi, *Being Black in the World* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1973), 40.
[25] Kopano Ratele, "Masculinities without Tradition," *Politikon* 40 no.1 (2013): 136.
[26] Mignolo, "*The Darker Side of Modernity*," 18.
[27] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 19.

also fundamentally gendered, and thus offered the sufficient critical tools for the analysis being presented in this article.[28]

Delinking is an epistemological shift away from the structures of modernity and allows for critical theories to emerge from the vestiges of languages, categories of thought, and subjectivities that modernity has negated, such as Black masculinities.[29] The negation of Black masculinities can only be overcome through a decolonial shift: "Delinking means to change the terms and not just the content of the conversation."[30] The terms of the conversation on Black masculinities have been defined by the colonial forms of knowledge production and epistemologies of modernity. Delinking shifts the focus to the subjects of the conversation: Black men. It is a mode of knowledge production that presents opportunities to understand Black men differently, opening up a variety of understandings of Black men that are not confined to the binary logic of modernity.

Clothing Black Body

The naked Black male body was the first site of offense and depravity in the missionary discourses. The smearing of the red ochre mixed with animal fats, which was a common practice within the AmaXhosa, BaTswana and Khoi, became symbolic of degradation and primitiveness. The trope of the "greasy native" arose from the practice of smearing ochre.[31] The Xhosa attire was a leather "kaross," which was mostly hung over the shoulders in accordance with the weather. William Shaw found the Xhosa attire "excessively disagreeable."[32] Moffat described the Tswana attire as "disgusting."[33] Missionaries placed Westernised clothing as a material symbol of conversion to Christianity.[34] Dress is a matter of cultural identity, and the need to clothe converts can easily be understood as the stripping of one identity to be adorned in another

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[28]   Floretta Boonzaaier and Taryn van Niekerk (eds.), *Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 4.

[29]   Mignolo, "DELINKING," 457.

[30]   Mignolo, "DELINKING," 459.

[31]   John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 224-7.

[32]   Shaw, *Story of my Missions*, 407.

[33]   Comaroff and Comaroff, *Dialectics of Modernity*, 226.

[34]   Norman Etherington, "Outward and Visible Signs of Conversion in Nineteenth-Century Kwazulu-Natal," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no.4 (2002): 423.

cultural identity.[35] European clothing became an outward symbol of civility in the South African missionary thinking.

Dress produces masculinities and the process of dressing Black men in Western forms of clothing was an imposition of Western masculinities on Black bodies.[36] The process of civilising Black men created a "new order of needs" among the Black converts, which could only be fulfilled through colonial merchants.[37] The clothing of the Black male body created a new material culture where their success was related to their European dress.[38]

Dominant forms of Black masculinities in South Africa continue to operate from a prism of "commodity capitalism" where a successful masculinity is bound with clothing labels.[39] Through the post-apartheid political economy and the emergence of a successful masculinity being tied to the acquisition of consumer goods, Ratele argues that Black men find a way of escaping their historic and contemporary marginality. This consumerist form of masculinity is sold through the media and television programmes and is one of the discursive currents that challenges the development of "socially conscious and egalitarian masculinities."[40]

The fact that a jacket and hat are part of modern-day Xhosa rites of passage into manhood, demonstrates the significant gendered consequences of missionary dress codes upon Black masculinities. Furthermore, it locates the development of consumerist forms of masculinities at their source, within a South African missionary ideology. A key conduit of such masculine identities is television programmes.

Civilising Black Masculinities

Black African rites of passage into manhood were deemed "heathen" practices in missionary thought. Circumcision, along with lobola and polygamy, were the vices of heathen life which stood in opposition to the

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[35] Ali A. Mazrui, *The Politics of Gender and the Culture of Sexuality: Western, Islamic, and African Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: UPA, 2014).

[36] Kopano Ratele, *Liberating Masculinities* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2016), 29.

[37] Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revolution and Revelation: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[38] Manganyi, *Being Black in the World*, 32.

[39] Ratele, *Liberating Masculinities*, 76-8.

[40] Ratele, *Liberating Masculinities*, 78.

Christian faith that needed eradication if Black men were truly to be civilised.[41] Commenting on *Bogwera*, the SeTswana rite of passage into manhood, Moffat describes it as a "prodigious barrier to the Gospel."[42] Molema describes the custom in the following way:

> This *bogwera* of the Bantu was analogous to the assumption of the *toga virilis* of the ancient Romans, for the youth who had undergone the rites was recognised as a man, having before this been a boy. The young men who were undergoing the rites were known as *makoloanyane* among BaTswana, and *abakhweta* among the Xhosa-Zulu peoples. They were isolated for a period of three months, being supervised in the meantime by antiquarians, who lectured them on the tribal traditions and customary laws, trained them to despise danger and never to show the feelings of surprise, fear, or pain – it was the place of women to do that – but, above all, their duty was to honour and protect the supreme chief, and to put the interests of the tribe before their own personal interests. [43]

Circumcision was not only a means for boys to enter into manhood, but through this custom, Black boys were taught the laws, customs, and traditions of their peoples. The process incorporated boys into the polity of their community and made them eligible for marriage. A function of the rite of passage was to ensure that communal values were always placed ahead of individual interests. Through the custom, the boys gained their legal, political, and social status. A direct attempt by Christian missionaries to eradicate the custom, was an attempt at eradicating the African being in the same manner that the Manichean misanthropic scepticism eradicates the being of colonised peoples.

In the missionaries' minds, "[t]here are two ways and two rites: the way of God's Word and the way of heathenism; the rite of baptism and the rite of circumcision. Let all give up the one and adopt the other."[44] Such thinking has been a constant feature of the missionary practice in South

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[41]   Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 77; Stephen Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier: Tswana Evangelists and their Communities During the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 40-1; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa,* 264.

[42]   Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 173.

[43]   Silas M. Molema, *The Bantu Past and Present: An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa* (Edinburgh: W. Green and Son Co., 1920), 122.

[44]   John Mackenzie, *Ten Years North of the Orange River: A Story of Everyday Life and Work among the South African Tribes from 1859 to 1869* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1871), 378.

Africa. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa only removed its policy on "Heathen Customs and Christian Institutions" from its statutes as late as 1991.[45] The Heathen Customs policy emerged in the nineteenth century when Wesleyan missionaries needed a stance on how to deal with children from non-Christian households, women in polygamous marriages, and the participation of church members in circumcision. The policy was a directive for the Wesleyan missionaries on how to address these issues. Such kinds of policies are indicative that, within a nineteenth-century missionary thinking, African forms of masculinities were incompatible with their understanding of the Christian faith. To be a Black man, in the ways that these men understood themselves, was demonised.

Problematising Polygamy

Missionary depictions of Black men presented polygamy as the source of all evils and inconsistent with Christian beliefs.[46] The Wesleyan missionary, Stephen Kay, described it as "the most formidable obstacles with which the Gospel has to contend, and constitutes a prolific source of many other evils."[47] Missionaries required men in polygamous marriages to divorce their wives and be left with one before they could gain church membership. King Sechele of the BaKwena was required to "discard" his wives so as to be baptised by David Livingstone.[48] Similarly, Chief Kama, the first AmaGqunukhwebe chief to convert to Christianity, rejected the wives that were given to him as gesture of strengthening diplomatic ties, on the grounds of professing Christianity.[49] To be a man, in missionary thinking, meant to have only one wife. Accepting the

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[45] Methodist Church of Southern Africa, *The Laws and Discipline* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House). The *Laws and Discipline* is the constitution of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and they only removed the Policy on Heathen Customs in its seventh edition, which was published in 1991.

[46] Elphick, "The Equality of Believers", 74-7; Diana Jeater, "Masculinity, Marriage and the Bible: New Pentecostal Masculinities in Zimbabwe," in *Masculinities under Neoliberalism*, eds. Andrea Cornwall, Frank G. Karioris and Nancy Lindisfarne (London: Zed Books, 2017), 166-8.

[47] Stephen Kay, *Researches in Caffraria: Describing the Character, Customs and Moral Condition of the Tribes inhabiting that part of Southern Africa* (London: John Mason, 1833), 185.

[48] Edwin Lloyd, *Three Great African Chiefs* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), 203.

[49] Joan Millard, "One Man's Experience of Colonialism: The Story of Chief Kama," in *Orality, Memory and the Past: Listening to the Voices of Black Clergy under Colonialism and Apartheid*, ed. Philippe Denis (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000), 139-42.

gospel meant for Black men that "the very day they give their consent to receive the Gospel, they that moment must give up their political authority, their manner of dress, marriage, circumcision."[50]

The problematisation of polygamy had two ramifications on the depiction of a Black man. The first ramification was that it ignored the fact that polygamy was limited to affluent Black men and exaggerated the widespread nature of the practice. Even though polygamy may have been common custom, it was only limited to wealthy men that could afford the responsibilities that came with it.[51] The reason that many missionaries exaggerated the prevalence of polygamy is because nineteenth-century missionaries mostly engaged with men of African royalty. Essentially, the Black man was depicted as part of a cohort of men who were all polygamous.

The second ramification is related to the association of polygamy with sexual immorality. The dominant missionary view was that this practice emerged from the Black men's hypersexuality. The missionary, Dudley Kidd, described Black men as "self-indulgent and brimming with sensuality, caring mostly for oxen, grain for beer and women."[52] Kidd was the originator of the theory of "pubertal degeneration." According to his theory, a Black person's brain began to degenerate upon reaching puberty. He attributed the degeneration to "[t]he everlasting talk and thought about matters of sex draw[ing] off the imagination from more healthy topics."[53] Needless to say, Kidd's racist theory morphed into an apartheid ideology that locked Black men into "interlocking systems of oppression" and a perpetual state of boyhood.[54] It is important to note the manner in which the missionary ideology depicted Black men as hypersexuals that would do anything to satisfy their sexual desires and thus normalised the practice of polygamy. Kay's comment on polygamy evinces this when he writes:

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[50] Volz, *African Teachers*, 40. The quote is attributed to James Read of the London Missionary Society in 1817 when he commented on the common view among BaTlhaping on the introduction of mission stations.

[51] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness*, 132; Elphick, *Equality of Believers*.

[52] Elphick, *Equality of Believers*, 78.

[53] Dudley Kidd, *Kaffir Socialism and the Dawn of Individualism: An Introduction to the Study of the Native Problem* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), 239.

[54] Simphiwe I. Dube, "Race silence: the oversignification of black men in 'the crisis of/in masculinities' in post-apartheid South Africa," *Acta Academia* 48, no.1 (2016): 85.

> By the Chiefs this abominable practice is carried to an incredible extent. Independently of the great number of women whom they regularly acknowledge as wives, their concubinage is altogether unlimited; for whenever the Kaffer (sic.) monarch hears of a young woman possessing more than ordinary beauty, and at all within his reach, he unceremoniously sends for her or fetches her himself; nor does anyone dare to question the propriety of his conduct. Seldom or never does any young girl, residing in his immediate neighbourhood, escape defilement after attaining the age of puberty.[55]

The trope went from "all Black men are polygamous" to "all Black men are hypersexual." These depictions fit neatly within the colonial thinking of modernity. With this insatiable lust in mind, the "mythical depiction of the black man's penis" becomes a threat and "the black man is depicted as an aggressive sexual beast who desires to rape women."[56]

The missionary depictions of Black men and their customs could not stand the test of scrutiny as the missionary was often without a response when challenged by Black men. In relation to circumcision, Black men questioned how the missionaries condemned the practice, while the Bible was littered with reference to that practice. Moremi once question-ed Rev. Lloyd as to why the missionary forbade circumcision, whereas Abraham was told to circumcise his descendants.[57] Similarly, Moffat could not respond when Sechele "challenge[d] that he explain to BaKwena why the missionaries had made him discard all but one of his wives, while Solomon and David had so many wives and concubines, and were still 'men after God's own heart'."[58] Contrary to the missionary belief, Molema contends that in fact, great fidelity existed between Black African men and women and that polygamy discouraged lust within their communities.[59] The direct attack on Black African customs was not premised on biblical teachings, but on racist and Eurocentric views of Black masculinities.

The missionary depictions of Black men presented them as being problematic hypersexuals that need the transformation prescribed by

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[55] Kay, *Researches in Caffraria*, 186-7.
[56] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 255.
[57] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness*, 245. Moremi was the Chief of BaTawana, which is part of the Tswana kingdom.
[58] Mutero Chirenje, "Church, State, and Education in Bechuanaland in the Nineteenth Century," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 9, no.3 (1976): 410.
[59] Molema, *The Bantu Past and Present*, 131.

their missionary's ideology. African masculinities were considered as a "manifestation of pathological irresponsibility, hatred and hedonism."[60] We now turn to the modern-day media depictions of Black men.

Uyajola uTatakho

uTatakho's producers – ConnectTV – describe the television production as a "docu-reality show that explores the contentions that arise out of the issue of paternity."[61] The show is premised on DNA testing of willing participants that have paternity disputes. Each episode involves new participants as they share their paternity dispute. Generally speaking, a participant comes to the show alleging that person X is their father, and then the show's producers organise a paternity test of all parties and the show ends with a revelation of the paternity test results.

With an approximate viewership of 650,000 people, the show commands a significant audience on South African television.[62] It has been broadcast on the Mzansi Magic channel for seven seasons since 2015. *UTatakho* has already captivated and maintained an audience interest for quite a few years. With 60% of South African children having absent fathers, it is not surprising that the contentious issue of paternity is captivating to South African audiences.[63] It is, however, interesting to note that all the participants who have settled their paternity dispute on the show are Black people. The paternity that has been in question has been that of Black men.

Historically, Black men in South Africa have been associated with negative stereotypes. A study examining representations of masculinity in the South African English language print media, found that the dominant ideas about masculinity remained strongly intertwined with ideologies of race and continued to produce long-standing racial hierarchies that positioned White masculinities on the "normative moral centre"

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[60] Rob Pattman and Deevia Bhana, "Black Boys with Bad Reputations," *Alternation* 13, no.6 (2006): 269.

[61] ConnectTV, "Utatakho", https://www.connect.tv/utatakho.

[62] Broadcasting Research Council of South Africa, "June 2019 Top TV Programmes," https://brcsa.org.za/june-2019-top-tv-programs/.

[63] Johan Fourie, "Why are there so many single mothers?" *Fin24*, 28 September 2018, https://www.fin24.com/Finweek/Opinion/why-are-there-so-many-single-mothers-20180926.

and Black masculinities on the "potentially deviant periphery."[64] Current understandings of masculine identity are shaped by representations, narratives, and stereotypes of the past.[65] When we understand the racialised hierarchies of South African masculinities in their historical context, the association of Black men with negative stereotypes as portrayed in *uTatakho*, are the continuities of patterns of power that emerged from colonialism and still define images of Black men in the media.

UTatakho has featured prominent Black men, Bonginkosi "Zola" Dlamini and Nimrod Nkosi as its hosts. Zola, being a kwaito musician and an actor, has featured in some of South Africa's leading productions, like *Yizo Yizo 2* and *Highjack Stories*, while his music has also featured in the soundtrack of the Oscar Academy Award winning production, *Tsotsi*. Zola's success as an actor and musician lies in his "ability to project the image of an authentic gangster/thug/tsotsi."[66] To South African audiences, Zola has an on-screen image that is already connoted with violence and criminality. To draw upon such an image and connote it with notions of paternity disputes and absent fatherhood, points to a layering of Black masculinities in various negative stereotypes. Essentially, Black men are a prominent feature in the show, not only as the participants, but also as the "face" of the show in its presenters, and are layered in negative Black stereotypes.

The use of the language of isiXhosa in naming the show also suggests that the targeted audience for the show are Black South Africans. Representations on paternity disputes on the show squarely locate Black men as being the only source of paternity disputes. The absence of other races of men on the show, presents Black men as sole proprietors in the business of absent fathers. It hones in on a "narrow and dehumanising

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[64] Erez Levon, Tommaso Milani and E. Dimitris Kitis, "The Topography of Masculine Normativities in South Africa," *Critical Discourse Studies,* 14 no.5 (2017): 526-7; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity*, 19.

[65] Jane Stadler, "Tsotsis, Coconuts and Wiggers: Black Masculinity and Contemporary South African Media," in *Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media*, eds. Adrian Hadland, Eric Louw, Simphiwe Sesanti and Herman Wasserman (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2008), 348.

[66] Adam Haupt, "Black Masculinity and the Tyranny of Authenticity in South African Popular Culture," in *Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media*, eds. Adrian Hadland, Eric Louw, Simphiwe Sesanti and Herman Wasserman (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2008), 382.

narrative of Black men as absent fathers."[67] The show furthermore depicts Black men as irresponsible fathers.

The simplistic caricatures of Black masculinities and negative stereo-types of Black men as irresponsible and absent fathers in the show, do not reveal the complexities around notions of fatherhood and absent fatherhood in South Africa. The settler-colonial capitalist system has, for generations, required Black men to abandon their families to serve settler-colonialist interests in urban centres of South Africa, and in the process dismembered Black family structures.[68] The legacies of the colonial disruption of Black family structures have continued into the twenty-first-century South Africa.[69] Such a historical context has, thus, normalised the absence of fathers in Black communities. The depictions of Black men on *uTatakho* ignore the ways in which such continuities of colonialism and apartheid rupture on Black family structures which are manifest in the current South Africa.

Patriarchal notions of fatherhood put much emphasis on economic provision as an essential aspect of fatherhood. Occupational and income attainment form part of the burdens of patriarchal notions of fatherhood upon which many men form their masculine identities.[70] With this, coupled with the economic marginalisation that Black men are faced with, many of them become unable to fulfil the patriarchal social responsibilities that are associated with fatherhood. The general structure of the show merely sensationalises the paternity disputes without much appreciation of the social and economic realities of the men featured on the show. The representations of Black men on *uTatakho* do not critically engage with their economic marginalisation in how it portrays them.

Uyajola 9/9 is a show that airs on Moja Love on Sunday evenings and is considered to be a South African rendition of the popular American

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[67] Makama *et al.*, "The Danger of a Single Feminist Narrative," 4.

[68] Siyasanga M. Tyali, "Dismembered by Colonialism: On Nadine Gordimer's July's People and its Entanglement with the Dynamics of a Black Family Structure under Apartheid South Africa," *Imbizo: International Journal of African Literary and Comparative Studies* 9, no.1 (2018): 2.

[69] Mamphela Ramphele and Linda Richter, "Migrancy, Family Dissolutions and Fatherhood" in *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*, eds. Linda Richter and Robert Morrell (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2006), 78-80.

[70] Kopano Ratele, "Analysing Males in Africa: Certain Useful Elements in Considering Ruling Masculinities," *African and Asian Studies* 7, no.4 (2008): 529.

programme, *Cheaters*. The show aired its first episode in May 2019 and has received a massive following on social media platforms. The twitter hashtag #Uyajola99 has been among the most trending topics in South Africa on Sunday evenings, when new episodes of the show air. The central theme of the show is that a person who suspects infidelity on the part of their partner, contacts the show in writing, whereupon the case is investigated and filmed. Each episode of the show features new participants being investigated for their romantic infidelity.

In all the episodes that have aired so far, all the parties that have been involved, were Black. Black men have been closely related to sexual promiscuity through *Uyajola 9/9*'s core narrative. In the same vein as *uTatakho*, *Uyajola 9/9* is presented by Black men, Molemo "Jub Jub" Maarohanye, Dr. Love and Moss Makwati.[71] A depiction that emerges from *Uyajola 9/9* is the idea that Black men are perpetually involved in scandalous sexual affairs and infidelity.

Uyajola 9/9's core narrative of scandalous sexual affairs is anchored in presenting Black people as hypersexual beings. Such representations of Black masculinities play on the historical stereotypes of the Black male body that is portrayed as being aggressive, hypersexual, deceitful, and dangerous.[72] At the core of these discourses lie sexist and racist representations of Black sexuality, premised on the European colonial imagination of the uncontrollable Black penis.[73] Black manhood is always presented with an oversized phallus that makes them "energizer-bunny sexual machines" that have "animalistic energy" within the imagination of coloniality.[74]

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[71] Rofhiwa Maneta, "Uyajola 9/9 uses black pain for ratings," *City Press*, 23 June 2019. https://city-press.news24.com/Trending/uyajola-99-uses-black-pain-for-ratings-20190623.

[72] Busi Makoni, "Labelling Black Male Genitalia and the 'New Racism:' The Discursive Construction of Sexual Racism by a Group of Southern African College Students," *Gender and Language* 10, no.1 (2016): 52. https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/GL/article/view/21434.

[73] Tamara Shefer and Kopano Ratele, "Racist Sexualisation and Sexualised Racism in Narratives on Apartheid," *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 16, no.1 (2011): 30.

[74] Neal Lester, "RACE," in *Cultural Encyclopaedia of the Penis*, eds. Michael Kimmel, Christine Milrod and Amanda Kennedy (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014): 180.

Delinking Black Masculinities

Black masculinities are a product of historical, often ongoing residual, imperialistic, colonialist, patriarchal, structural, symbolic, and direct aggression on Black people.[75] Delinking is essentially challenging the racial and sexual/gendered hierarchies that are structural nodes of coloniality.[76] These racialised and patriarchal hierarchies are premised on stereotypical views of Black masculinities, as being characterised by hypersexuality, deceitfulness, and absent fathering. Delinking means that media portrayals of Black men must go beyond the limited understandings of Black men that are characteristic of coloniality.

Narratives on Black men must locate Black masculinities in the interlocking systems of the oppression in which they exist. This situatedness, in patriarchal and racialised hierarchies that have histori-cally placed Black male bodies in inferior and dehumanising positions, ignores the multiplicity of structural forces that confront Black masculi-nities.

Delinking is the realisation that Black masculinities operate from marginalised positions. From that marginal point, the interwoven nature of economic marginalisation, stereotypical hypersexualisation, and notions like absent fathering coalesce into solid structures of coloniality.

It cannot be denied that Black masculinities contain negative elements. Neither can it be denied that Black masculinities are weighted by the patriarchal burden of the systems of coloniality that place an economic provision and male dominance as foundational to the construction of masculine identities. How else would one account for the fact that young Black men face the highest risk of homicidal victimisation? The removal of the patriarchal system of coloniality offers new ways of constructing Black masculinities that go beyond the "binaristic" logic of coloniality, that currently underscores discourses of Black masculinities.[77] Representa-tions of Black men need to highlight them in their varied spaces.

Delinking Black masculinities must not be understood as a rebuttal to the negative images of Black men in the media. It must open up a complex-ity of the representations of Black men. It must furthermore take into con-

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[75]   Ratele, "Violence, Militarised Masculinity and Positive Peace."
[76]   Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity*, 19.
[77]   Makama *et al.*, "The Dangers of a Single Feminist Narrative," 5.

sideration that dominant discourses of masculinities have been impacted upon by Christian missionaries and their distortions of Black men.

Conclusion

Nineteenth-century discourses of Black masculinities were premised on racialised stereotypes that are a product of the European imagination. From that imagination arose the characterising of Black men with hyper-sexual and animalistic traits. Clothing the Black male body can be regarded as a way in which the missionary ideology sought to transform Black men from their animalistic hypersexuality into men that fit into the missionary standards. Being made men, included being incorporated into gendered hierarchies of coloniality, albeit as marginalised subjects.

That the media plays a pervasive role in the ways in how South African men shape their own masculine identities cannot be argued against. It is critical that studies of men scrutinise the content that is produced by media platforms which can negatively affect the construction of masculine identities in South Africa.[78] The media offers its consumers a negative way of understanding themselves as fathers and masculine subjects.[79]

uTatakho and *Uyajola 9/9* perpetuate the ontologically violent stereotypes of nineteenth-century missionary discourses. Through a regulating dress code, initiation rites, and marital customs of Black men, the missionaries evinced strong traits of coloniality and ontological violence. In the mind of the nineteenth-century missionary in South Africa, Black men were presented as non-beings, characterised by a wanton propensity for sexual promiscuity and irresponsibility. Both television shows focus on the same themes of Black male hypersexuality and irresponsible fathering. These narratives of Black men are also a trend in broader Black masculinities discourses.

In both shows, Black men become central figures and are associated with sexual promiscuity and paternity disputes as well as irresponsible

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[78] Mandisa Malinga and Kopano Ratele, "It's Cultivated, Grown, Packaged and Sold with a Price Tag:" Young Black Men's Consumption of Media Images of Love, Happiness and Constructions of Masculinity," *Culture, Society & Masculinities* 8, no.2 (2016): 114.

[79] Nhlanhla Mkhize, "African Traditions and the Social, Economic and Moral Dimensions of Fatherhood," in *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*, eds. Linda Richter and Robert Morrell (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2006): 196.

fathering, in the same way as the missionary depictions of Black men in the nineteenth-century South Africa described Black men as brimming with sensuality. These shows highlight a "hypervisible black masculinity" anchored on capitalist consumptions, paternal irresponsibility, and sexual promiscuity.[80]

Nuanced depictions of Black men in media spaces should include the historical context that enabled fatherlessness to thrive in Black communities. The patriarchal burden of economic provision that is placed on Black men by coloniality, needs to be challenged when engaging with narratives of absent fathers.

The hypersexualisation of Black men forms part of the arsenal of weapons that coloniality unleashed in its portrayal of Black men. The emergence of these themes in modern-day South Africa illustrates the continuities of the logic of coloniality. Many of the same ideas that served as justification for the direct colonial rule in Africa have now been modified by the mainstream media to perpetuate coloniality.[81] Delinking from such logic requires representations of Black men that are located in the historical, economic, and sociocultural context of marginality that Black men exist in.

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[80] Mbuyiselo Botha and Kopano Ratele, "Ought Anti-Racist Males be (Pro)Feminist Too? Engaging Black Men in work against Gender and Sexual-based violence" in *A Reflexive Inquiry into Gender Research: Towards a new Paradigm of Knowledge Production and Exploring New Frontiers of Gender Research in Southern Africa*, eds. Samantha van Schalkwyk and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2015), 136.

[81] Morgan Ndlovu, "Manufacturing Black-on-Black Violence in Africa: A Decolonial Perspective on *Mfecane* and Afrophobia/Xenophobia in South Africa," *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies – Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 12, no.2 (2017): 107.

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Gender, Religion, and the Media: An Analysis of Selected Media Representations of Fungisai's Images and Music

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[1]SHORT BIO
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ABSTRACT
The study looks at the associations between gender, religion, and the media through an analysis of some media representations of selected images and music of the Zimbabwean gospel "diva," Fungisai Zvakavapano Mashavave (hereon Fungisai). With close to two decades on the Zimbabwean gospel music scene, Fungisai is not only a celebrated musician, but her career also demonstrates the complex ways in which power operates on subjectivities that are governed by gender and religion. The study aims to unpack the ways in which this power is determined and endorsed and also how the female gospel musician's image and music choices work to subvert this power. Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of hybridity as the "third space," third culture, and a mixture of two cultures and identities, provides the theoretical guideline for this study's arguments. As a female gospel musician, Fungisai's image and music choices have come under scrutiny and have been subjected to socio-cultural and religious prescriptions which dictate often constricting perceptions of what it means to be an "ideal" woman. The study is particularly interested in the ways in which Fungisai navigates her way through various competing as well as colluding systems of power in order to forge emancipatory religious identities.

KEYWORDS
gender; religion; media; gospel music; the "third space"

Introduction

Zimbabwean women generally occupy a position where the vast and largely problematic complexities of gender and religion are revealed and contested. The major theme that has been revealed, based on various scholarly perspectives, is that they occupy a subordinate position to men – a position that has not changed as yet. Thus, when it comes to the issue of the interconnection of gender, religion, and the media, the theme of women's subordination persists. This study discusses the complex intersections of gender, religion, and the media in the analysis of selected media images and music of Fungisai. The analysis aims to show the ways in which religion and gender affect these media images and music and how Fungisai formats her identities within these inter-sections. The core argument is that Fungisai's images and musical aesthetics are ambivalent and this ambivalence is conceptualised in terms of

Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity in the so-called "third space." The study shows how the third space signifies an important and creative space that values multiple and alternative identities for women like Fungisai, whose lives are governed by the dictates of religion and patriarchy. Before these issues are discussed, I will provide a broad spectrum background view of the issues that have generally shaped female Zimbabwean musicians.

Women and Music in Zimbabwe: A Background View

Research on Zimbabwean women in the music industry generally exposes exclusionary practices that are informed by societal assumptions about the subordinate position of women. For example, Kerstin Bolzt (2007) provides a historically linear analysis of the role and place of female Zimbabwean artists and contends that they have been marginalised and excluded as national citizens.[1] Bolzt confirms how the tension between the religio-cultural space and the domestic space shapes the lives of many female artists. Consequently, the women who try to move freely as artists into the public sphere beyond the accepted domestic domain, are constantly challenged by men and the governing concepts of gender.[2] The dominant concepts of gender dictate that women should occupy the domestic sphere which is located and symbolised by the home. Bolzt's study is pertinent because it critically interrogates how female artists negotiate the contradictions between the private and public spaces.[3] Similarly, Joyce Jenje-Makwenda (2013) confirms that in Zimbabwe, only a few women take music as a career and if they do so, they are either employed as backing vocalists for male musicians or as dancers.[4] This systematic marginalisation of female musicians is best explained by Bolzt as a direct result of colonial machinations that have for a long time pushed African women into the abyss of invisibility. For instance, colonial urban settlements were created for the comfort and residence of white colonial masters with black men supplying cheap labour. However, the growth of urban settlements added to the demands for entertainment, and because African women were not meant to exist

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[1] Kerstin Bolzt, *Women as Artists in Contemporary Zimbabwe* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African studies, 2007).

[2] Ezra Chitando and Pauline Mateveke, "Challenging Patriarchy and Exercising Women's Agency in Zimbabwean Music: Analysing the Careers of Chiwoniso Maraire and Olivia Charamba," *MUZIKI* 9, no.2 (2012): 43.

[3] Bolzt, *Women as Artists*.

[4] Joyce Jenje-Makwenda, *Women Musicians of Zimbabwe: A Celebration of Women's Struggles for Voice and Artistic Expression* (Harare: Joyce Jenje-Makwenda, 2013).

within these settlements, it also meant that they were excluded from the music making processes. The women that seized the opportunity to achieve fame and fortune, became inextricably linked to the urban culture, although they were not easily accepted by either the white or the black patriarchs.

Research also shows that these exclusionary practices have endured within the postcolonial context. Mwenda Ntarangwi (1999) has the opinion that music making as a social and cultural enterprise reflects on gender realities and so, within music production and consumption, women and men face very different cultural, social, institutional, moral, political, and economic constraints. These constraints limit the potential of female musicians to own their "voice."[5] Accordingly, women who initially made it into the Zimbabwean music industry did it with their husbands or family members because singing with family or husbands afforded them the necessary social status, making them some kind of role models.[6] The need to control and manage women in the music industry was driven by the view that music, especially popular music, was a site of deviance characterised by individuals of loose morals. Consequently, women in the music industry tend to receive harsher criticism than men because gender codes assume that a woman must uphold the national culture and values. Ntarangwi also argues that music has not exactly been sanctioned as "real" work even though the artists themselves regard it as work. It has always been associated with leisure and entertainment and so women's participation or involvement in it is usually an unwelcome undertaking.[7] Despite these restrictions and social constraints, female Zimbabwean musicians have managed to move outside the socially sanctioned domestic spaces even though this movement comes with a price. Ntarangwi further shows that the public perception of female musicians is negative. If a woman exists outside the restricted social area of the home and enters a public space such as the popular music environment, she is labelled a "whore" or "loose," and regarded as sexually available to all men, as opposed to the marked categories of "mother," "wife," or "sister" whose existence in society is

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5   Mwenda Ntarangwi, "Musical Practice as a Gender Experience: Examples from Kenya and Zimbabwe," in *Reflections on Gender Issues in Africa*, ed. Patricia McFadden (Harare: Sapes Trust, 1999): 34.
6   Jenje-Makwenda, *Women Musicians of Zimbabwe*.
7   Ntarangwi, "Musical Practice," 34.

bound by a kinship relationship that brings with it social and cultural expectations and values.

Fred Zindi (2010) confirms Ntarangwi's position when he alludes to the strong misconceptions about Zimbabwean women in the music industry and how they have found the business to be socially and emotionally draining because they constantly have to defend their position as morally upright. According to Zindi, the negative associations with women in the music industry means that there are not many female musicians in Zimbabwe.[8] This also means that the gospel music genre has become more popular with women who would like to venture into the music industry. Zindi explains that gospel music is considered a safe platform from which a woman can find herself on the music scene: "Because people fear God, it is difficult for male chauvinists to stop their daughters from singing about God, just like they find it difficult to stop their wives from going to church."[9] Yet, Fungisai's journey and experiences within the gospel music industry deconstructs Zindi's concept of the "safety" of gospel music. Fungisai's narrative which will be analysed in the ensuing sections, highlights that the perceived "safety" within gospel music is not that safe. However, the debates by Zimbabwean music scholars attest to the discursive power of being gendered and demonstrate that the struggle to control and manage women's music making is a result of strongly gendered stereotypes about what it means to be a man or a woman. Gender is entangled with issues of power and identity and this is reflected in the struggles faced by female musicians in Zimbabwe. Society's anxiety about women's participation in the music industry emanates from the impulse to control. Therefore, being gendered as a woman becomes a constraint to a successful music career. This back-ground to Zimbabwean women in music sets the pace for this article because I would like to proffer the argument that Fungisai's voice, as it emanates from the lyrics of her gospel music, the media images she projects through her fashion choices, and what she says in the media, are intricately linked to societal, cultural, and religious settings and these in turn, shape the trajectories of her identity formation.

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[8]   Fred Zindi, *Music Guide for Zimbabwe* (Harare: Zindisc Publications, 2010).
[9]   Zindi, *Music Guide for Zimbabwe*, 69.

A Theoretical Overview of Homi Bhabha's Concepts of Hybridity and the "Third Space"

The notion of hybridity was introduced into the broad field of postcolonial studies during the 1980s by the renowned Indian postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha. Bhabha (1990) conceptualises hybridity as the "third space," referring to a third culture – a mixture of two or more competing cultures and identities. This "third space" enables other cultures and identities to emerge and its function is to displace the histories that constitute it by setting up new structures of authority and new political initiatives.[10] Bhabha's ideas about hybridity stress the impossibility of purity as a cultural phenomenon.[11] Katheryne Mitchell (1997) also asserts that hybridity's inherent resistance to fixed binaries attracts the interest of postcolonial theorists.[12] Hybridity is therefore celebrated within the postcolonial theorising because of how it resists rigid narratives. This resistance is appreciated because it provides a way out of a dualistic philosophy and allows room for the inscription of the intervention of the subaltern. Bhabha insists that hybridity points to the idea that cultures are diverse, and that cultural diversity must not be viewed as a short-coming, as it must be taken as good and positive. I agree with Bhabha's position on cultural diversity because it is my opinion that, as a post-colonial subject, the formation of Fungisai's identities is stimulated by various religio-cultural signifiers, and these result in multiple ways of being Fungisai. To explain his position on cultural diversity Bhabha states that

> there is no culture which is full in itself because there are other cultures to contradict its authority and also because its own symbol forming activity always underscores the claim to originary, holistic, organic, identity…By denying the essentialism of a prior given original culture, then we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.[13]

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10 Homi Bhabha and Jonathan Rutherford, "Interview with Homi Bhabha: The Third Space," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

11 Anjali Prabhu and Ato Quayson, "Postcolonising through Relation," in *Postcolonial Studies in a Francophone Frame: Intersections and Revisions*, ed. Anne Donadey and Adali Murdoch (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2004), 224-34.

12 Katheryne Mitchell, "Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 1997, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1068/d150533.

13 Bhabha and Rutherford, "Interview with Homi Bhabha," 210-1.

Both Bhabha's application of culture as a continuation in a process of hybridity and his idea of hybridity as a space between the rules of engagement, have inspired this article's philosophical underpinnings. Bhabha's conceptualisation of the "third space" is therefore applied as a way of extending knowledge about Fungisai's ambivalent identities. The "third space" theory is also used as a way of challenging the dualistic philosophies emanating from religious and gendered discourses not only about Fungisai, but also about the position of women in society.

Methodology

Robert Burgess (1992)[14] insists that there is no best method of conducting research and that researchers need to be guided by the kind of research questions that they wish to pose. Going by Burgess' argument and because of the very nature of feminine religious "identities" which provide a wider philosophical choice to this study, a qualitative research methodology has been chosen as the appropriate approach from which to conduct this research. Qualitative research refers to the kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.[15] It is, as Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin argue, research about people's lives, stories, behaviour, organisational functioning, social movements, and interactional relationships. Strauss and Corbin express the idea that qualitative research is focused on studying human behaviour and the social world that is inhabited by humans. Likewise, Beverley Hancock (1998) provides five general questions which she purports to be the central questions that qualitative research seeks to answer and which are related to why people behave in the way they do and how opinions and attitudes are formed.[16] It is therefore a fact that qualitative research reflects and capitalises on the special character of people as objects of inquiry which dictates this study's choice of methodology (cf. Bryman 1988).[17]

This study places some media images of Fungisai in conversation with the gospel message in her music so as to understand how they

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[14]   Robert G. Burgess, *Issues in Sociology: Research Methods* (Edinburg: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1993).

[15]   Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures and Techniques* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1990).

[16]   Beverley Hancock, *Trent Focus for Research and Development in Primary Healthcare: An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (Nottingham: Trent Focus Group, 1998).

[17]   Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

represent her identities. Identity is an unstable concept: its meanings and usages are influenced by various forces. Although qualitative research has been condemned on the basis of being abstract, it is this abstract nature of qualitative research that aptly suits the multiplicity and instability within the phenomenon of identities. The general image that qualitative research conveys about the social order is one of inter-connection and change,[18] and this study endeavours to unpack whether or not the said "interconnection and change" reflect in Fungisai's identity formation processes. There is an implicit element built into much quali-tative research, which is both a symptom and a cause of an undertaking to view social life in processional rather than static terms. This becomes ideal to the undertaking of my study because, as I argue in the following section, Fungisai's construction of identity seems to be an ongoing process.

Having selected the qualitative research methodology, it was necessary to select qualitative research tools (methods) with which to collect the data accordingly. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis to interpret the selected data. Qualitative textual analysis is a research tool that is used to examine data as it appears through a variety of mediums.[19] The data, in this case selected media images and music of Fungisai, serve as "texts" under study and will be used to assess the range of meanings, values, and messages sent through it so as to understand the interconnections of gender, religion, and media, and its impact on Fungisai's identity construction. The "texts" are purposively selected in order to aptly reflect the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling is a method in which a sample is deliberately chosen due to the qualities that it possesses.[20] Purposive sampling enables the researcher to select only the material that brings out the study's core arguments.

Positing Hybridities in the Media Images of Fungisai

What has drawn my interest in Fungisai is her 2016 "scandalous" pro-nouncement that she "is not a 'gospel' musician and did not have any desire to be labelled as such."[21] After almost a decade in the gospel

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18 Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research.*

19 Jason A. Smith, "Textual Analysis," in *The International Encyclopedia of Communica-tion Research*, ed. Jörg Matthes (Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley and Sons, 2017).

20 Maria D.C. Tongco, "Purposive Sampling as a Tool for Information Selection," *Ethno-botany Research and Applications* 5 (2007), 147.

21 Fred Zindi, "Is Fungisai a Saint or a Villain?" *The Herald*, 28 March 2016, http://www.herald.co.zw/is-fungisai-a-saint-or-villain/.

music industry and dominating the Zimbabwean gospel music charts, this declaration came as a surprise. To illuminate her declaration, Fungisai exposed that the label "gospel musician" was a sort of maze that she tried to extricate herself from. According to Fungisai, she was battling the norms of society ever since she was labelled a gospel musician. On this revelation, Zindi (2016) expounds that gospel artists are associated with righteous things of the church as well as Christian values, and once that perception has been established by the society at large, it becomes difficult for the artists to remove themselves from that perception. Hence, Fungisai rightly feels that the label "gospel musician" has become the stumbling block to her development as a musician. She explains: "Problem yangu inenge yemakaradhi. Unogona kukwana kumablacks. Wokwana futi kumavheti asi kwese usinganyatsotambirwa" (*My problem is more like the coloured[22] people's problem. They can fit in the black race, they can also fit in the white race but in both worlds they are not made to feel as if they belong*).[23]

Fungisai comes to this conclusion based on her experiences in the realm of the Zimbabwean Pentecostal Church – a realm that most scholars have concluded to be heavily patriarchal. Nomatter Sande (2016) confirms this situation when analysing the link between faith and gender equality within the Zimbabwean Pentecostal Church.[24] He is of the view that Christianity, particularly its brand of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, has normalised unequal gender expectations by institutionalising and perpetuating patriarchy. As a popular gospel musician, Fungisai also had to deal with the gendered pressures of the secular world. She argues that the church community only appreciates her for her music which attracts the presence of huge crowds to the church. However, the church does not consider her to be spiritually developed enough to evangelise. On the other hand, while the secular musicians appreciate her, the appreciation comes with certain barriers and boundaries because they are wary of her gospel orientation.

Fungisai's dilemma illustrates the alienating effects of discourses that attempt to place individuals within a fixed realm. Her predicament perhaps also echoes the quandary generally faced by Zimbabwean

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[22] The term "coloured person" is used as an ethnic descriptor denoting a mixed race person (usually a mixture of a white European and black African).

[23] Zindi, "Is Fungisai a Saint or a Villain?"

[24] Nomatter Sande, "Faith and Equality: Rethinking Women in Leadership Positions in Pentecostalism," *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 22, no.2 (2016): 50-62.

women who still bear religious and culturally stimulated patriarchal prescriptions of ideal womanhood. Pascah Mungwini (2010) agrees that Zimbabwean women have to live according to the patriarchal prescriptions of ideal womanhood which include, but are not limited to, motherhood, loyalty, stoicism, simplicity, faithfulness, forgiveness, and being industrious and hospitable.[25] Although these are good values that human beings must aspire to have, prescribing them to women's identities has the potential of placing women in a rigid box and it becomes easy for society to condemn them if they fail to live up to these values. This is fittingly illustrated when Fungisai, a revered and respected gospel artist, suddenly lost the reverence and respect of most of her fans when she reinvented the sound of her music as well as her fashion choices. This reinvention confused and appalled her fans who felt that she was at a crossroads in her career and was veering from the path of righteousness. Hence, at the onset of her attempts to extricate herself from the "maze" of essentialising labels upon her identity, there was a huge backlash and controversy that rendered her a victim of bullying and hate speech from social networking sites such as Facebook and Whatsapp. However, she continued to reinvent her public image by wearing clothes that are not typical of a "respected" and "respectful" gospel musician. For example, *Celebrity News* (2016) posted an image on its website of Fungisai wearing an all leather jumpsuit.[26] The image invited controversy which stemmed from the fact that the leather clad Fungisai was a drastic departure from the "respectful" formally dressed Fungisai. The leather fashion was deemed by many of her fans as unsuitable for a proper gospel musician. Leather fashion is subversive and is associated with the rebellious and deviant values of the secular world. As a gospel musician, she has faced social restrictions on dressing and was expected to conform to prescribed standards about how a gospel musician should dress and behave. Dressing becomes part of the gender socialisation process and one of the dictates of this socialisation is that gospel musicians should look "respectful." A similar controversy was also generated when *Zimetro* (2016) posted an image of Fungisai

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[25] Pascah Mungwini, "Rape, Sexual Politics and the Construction of Manhood among the Shona of Zimbabwe: Some Philosophical Reflections," *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* (2010): 1-19.

[26] Celebrity News, Is Fungisai Mashavave The New Zim Dance-Hall Queen? *Youth Village: Zim's Youth Portal*, n.d., https://youthvillage.co.zw/2016/02/is-fungisai-mashavave-the-new-zim-dance-hall-queen/.

dressed in a torn denim with pink army boots.[27] Perhaps one of Fungisai's most confounding and controversy-ridden images was posted in *The Sunday Mail* (2016).[28] The image is of Fungisai lying on the grass by the riverside. In her hands she is holding the mbira[29] musical instrument and she has waist-long dreadlocks that prominently flow around her body.

The image is confounding because of the various cultural identifications and practices which it elicits. The cultural identifications and practices invited controversy because of its radical departure from what is regarded as an ideal gospel look. To begin with, one cannot help noticing the long almost waist-length dreadlock hairstyle. On the issue of dreadlocks and female identity formation, Ezra Chitando and Anna Chitando (2004) highlight that the cultivation of dreadlocks has worked synonymously with the challenges of forming postcolonial identities. They observe a Christian religious inspired opposition to the cultivation of dreadlocks, based on the fact that dreadlocks are originally associated with oppositional religions such as the Rastafarians and indigenous Zimbabwean religious practices of spirit mediums and the ancestral cult.[30] Fungisai's cultivation of dreadlocks, therefore, opposes the Christian religious values and ideals which her gospel music is supposed to communicate. I, however, argue that the dreadlocks seem to tally with Fungisai's need to extricate herself from the burdensome label of being a gospel musician and its consequential social constraints. The hair becomes a symbol of her refusal to be subjected to the weight of social regulations. Chitando and Chitando also opine that the length of dreadlocks is usually indicative of a woman's degree of non-conformity, that is, the longer the dreadlocks the more the rebellion. Based on their findings, the length of Fungisai's dreadlocks as illustrated in *The Sunday Mail* image, demonstrates an exceptionally rebellious stance. Her adoption of an unconventional image, an image that is deemed as

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[27] Kells. Fungisai's New Album will be Dancehall, *SA Breaking News*, 11 May 2016, https://zimetro.com/fungisais-dancehall/.

[28] Leisure, I'm not a Church Person: Fungisai, *The Sunday Mail*, 17 January 2016, https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/im-not-a-church-person-fungisai.

[29] The mbira (thumb piano) is an indigenous musical instrument that is common to the Shona people of Zimbabwe. It is played by using one's thumb to pluck the metal spikes that are attached to a wooden board.

[30] Ezra Chitando and Anna Chitando, "Black Female Identities in Harare: The Case of Young Women with Dreadlocks," *Zambezia* (2004), 1-21.

oppositional to what is expected of a gospel artist, reflects postcolonial understandings of the mobility of identities.

Mitchell (1997) informs us that these postcolonial conceptualisations of identity as mobile, marginal, contradictory, and ambiguous can really be soothing.[31] Fungisai's alternative image is meant to show the society that her personal, religious, and musical identities are not static, but are constantly evolving. She has strategically transported her identities from the centre of gospel music and its religious implications and has position-ed herself at its margins. The effect of this departure from the source is that it has equipped her with the necessary space to explore her musical options beyond what is expected by the society and the church. It is this movement beyond the societal and church expectations that appropria-tely reflects Bhabha's concept of the "third space." For Bhabha, the "third space" represents some kind of disturbance of direction. It is, as explain-ed by Fetson Kalua (2009), a phase in the life of an individual which denies any attempts at settled assumptions about its identity because of the inherent contradictions and instabilities that often come to haunt the subject. The "third space" is therefore not always a comfortable place to be.[32] Based on Fungisai's struggles, the "third space" is riddled by numerous contestations. These contestations emanate from the ambi-valence of the identity signals that spring from the constant evolution of Fungisai's images. Thus, one gets the impression that Fungisai is currently a combination of multiple hybrid components.

Singing Ambivalence in Fungisai's "*Vanondibatirana*" (2016) (*They hold me still*)

Fungisai's hybrid outlook also culminates in the aesthetics of her music. Lately, she has taken to metaphorically "dining with the devil" by collabo-rating with musicians from the Zimbabwean dancehall music genre. Zindi argues that the hysteria and controversy around Fungisai's decision to collaborate with the Zimbabwean dancehall musician, Killer-T, lies in the fact that Zimbabwean dancehall music is regarded as the devil's music. It is associated with misogyny, sex, and drug abuse and it is therefore perceived as "unchristian." As a result, by collaborating with Killer-T, Fungisai has failed to live up to the expectations of the church and

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[31] Mitchell, "Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity."
[32] Fetson Kalua, "Homi Bhabha's Third Space and African Identity," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 21, no.1 (2009): 23-32.

societal standards and this compromises her Christian principles.[33] Zindi's assessment is too rigid because what Fungisai is doing is to diversify her fandom by bringing her gospel message to a different audience, a younger audience. Despite the criticism from the public, she is not apologetic about the mixed signals that her image and her music seem to project. In the song that she collaborates with Killer-T, entitled "Vanondibatirana" (*They hold me still*), Fungisai seems to be aware of this pressure from society. Although the song signifies the subduing of someone who is possessed by evil demons, and church elders are being called upon to come and help to exorcise the demons, I would like to argue that the song converses multiple messages. In the song she sings:

Kuchurch vanondibatirana	In the church they hold me still
Izvi zvine chirevo	This must mean something
Ndidziviriirei changamire	Protect me sovereign
Kurasika baba ndekwevanhu	Father, getting lost is common to people
Handimboziva zvinondibata sei	I don't know what has possessed me
Zvinoti kana zvandibata	When they possess me
Zvinondiwisira pasi	They pull me down
Toda munhu waMwari	We need a man of God
Rwendo rwarwadza	The journey is now painful

Superficially, the song could be referring to a person calling for the exorcism of demons that have made their life difficult. However, reading between the lines, the persona in the song enacts the ways in which Fungisai the musician feels lost and isolated as a result of her decision to go against the gospel music grain. She could be acknowledging that she has indeed lost her way and she needs the church to bring her back in line. The dreadlocks and the seemingly outrageous outfits may signify this purported "madness." The persona also captures how Christian values are deployed to hold women down and how female gospel musicians are generally forced to sing in a certain way. Accordingly, the song becomes a critique of the church and its uncompromising structures that stifle women into rigid boxes. These multiple meanings and mixed signals embody one of the major concerns of postcolonialism, namely hybridity.

Hybridity is further projected by Fungisai's infusion of the dancehall sound. It is important to remember that hybridity has been theorised as

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[33]   Zindi, "Is Fungisai a Saint or a Villain?"

crucial to the tactical war against dominant hegemonies.[34] Fungisai utilises dancehall music to challenge the dominant perceptions about the purity of gospel music and the impurity of dancehall music. It is worth mentioning that she has also taken to using the "mbira" music instrument as captured in the aforementioned image which was published in *The Sunday Mail*. The "mbira" (thumb piano) is emblematic of the Zimbabwean traditional culture and religious practices because it is closely associated with spirit possession.[35] Fungisai's use of the "mbira" may reflect the multiple cultural influences and it confounds any simplistic essentialist understanding of the artist and her music.

By hybridising her music, it becomes difficult to place fixed labels on the artist and her music because, even though she uses the "mbira" and sometimes infuses her music with the dancehall sound, her message is still gospel. Such a scenario attests to the advantages of postcolonial pluralism, ambivalence, and non-fixity which, according to Robert Young (2001), not only mark a contemporary social fluidity and dispossession, but also a new stability and self-assurance.[36] I am amenable to such a trajectory because the Zimbabwean postcolonial context is complex and it would be defunct to stick to artistic purity when the context itself is not informed by a singular art form. The fluidity of the postcolonial context should therefore not be regarded as threatening to identities. It should instead be taken as an anchor from which postcolonial subjects derive their identities.

Fungisai Within the "Third Space:" Resistance or Acquiescence?

It is important to problematise Bhabha's "third space" and the resultant notions of hybrid identities. This is because the "third space" is characterised by ambivalence, and according to Anne Donadey (2001), notions of hybridity and ambivalence always lie at the crossroads of resistance and complicity.[37] Anjali Prabhu (2007) stresses the importance of distinguishing between hybridity as a theoretical concept and hybridity as

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34   Mitchell, "Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity."
35   Claire Jones, "Shona Women Mbira Players: Gender Tradition and Nation in Zimbabwe," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 17, no.1 (2008): 125-49.
36   Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).
37   Anne Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001).

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social change with historical specificity. Prabhu argues that notions of hybridity are tied to the concept of agency and that agency has to be radical in the sense that it must be tied to social change in which some inequality or injustice is addressed.[38] In view of the fact that religion, specifically Christianity, has been accused of perpetuating and institutionalising gender inequality which affects many women in Zimbabwe, the evolution of Fungisai becomes revolutionary because, while she utilises it to address the injustices that are meted on her personal subjectivities, it is also connected to the injustices meted out to Zimbabwean women in general. Because of her position as a celebrity, there are possibilities for broadly influencing and inspiring Zimbabwean women's collective struggles for gender parity. Prabhu is of the view that the most productive theories of hybridity are those that effectively balance the task of inscribing a functional instrumental version of the relationship between culture and society with that of enabling a more utopian or collective image of society.[39] Through the analysis of Fungisai's struggles and the strategies she employs to overcome these struggles, one gets a feeling of this collective struggle of women against society and religion. Fungisai's unapologetic assertions of her hybrid religious and musical identities work for her own personal and professional goals, but it can also be implemented to address the challenges of ordinary Zimbabwean women who experience the same systems of oppression.

Victor Aguilan (2017) explains that the "third space" offers an effective mode of articulation, a productive and reflective space that produces new possibilities.[40] It must therefore be appreciated for the ways in which it affords Fungisai the opportunity to broaden her musical style beyond the limiting confines of what the society thinks gospel music should sound like and what a gospel musician should look like. The hybrid within this "third space" becomes a counter narrative to the artificiality of the boundaries between gospel music and dancehall music, between the religious and the secular, and between what is deemed respectable and unrespectable. Evangelism does not always come neatly packaged. It can also be packaged within "disruptive" domains, and disruption is not

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[38] Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).
[39] Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects*.
[40] Victor Aguilan, "Theology of Struggle: A Postcolonial Critique of Philippine Christianity and Society," Working Paper, 2017, DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.25762.02246.

always such a bad thing because there are moments when disruption brings about emancipatory raptures.

Conclusion

The study analysed the intersections of gender, religion, and the media, and revealed how Fungisai successfully uses both her music and her personal image to articulate the complex obscurities and multifaceted oppositions of her identity, which reflects the conflicting elements of endurance and delight that are often experienced by postcolonial subjects. The sense of mixture that is evoked by Fungisai, does not act as a barrier to her assertions of identity. Instead, these different cultural signs that she emanates, decentre the notion of a unified gendered and religious subject and instead showcase the constructive mixture of cultures which is a tradition of the "third space." Fungisai's struggle to assert her own sense of identity outside the society's prescriptive norms, reveals a performative hybrid identity. It is performative because it does not have a rational standing except from the artist's various actions which point to its existence. As a result, it is not conceivable to refer to an accurate or real self when it comes to Fungisai. Instead, she signifies multiple selves which come into being at the point of delivery. This is what Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo mean when they assert that such performative articulations of hybrid identities position the postcolonial female body as a particularly charged site of cultural contestation in the process of constructing a hybrid subjectivity.[41] In this sense, Fungisai's hybrid identity seems to offer her an effective way of resisting the pressures and discourses of religio-cultural purity which underpin the society's expectations about her. Maria La Barbera (2015) raises the idea that the main goals of hybrid identities are frequently related to upward mobility.[42] This can also be equated to Fungisai's own need for upward mobility within her career, her development as a musician, her attempt to broaden her musical horizon, and to transcend the restrictions placed upon her person and her music. She refuses to be rendered knowable because she probably appreciates that being knowable would make it easy for society to control her. She has adopted a hybrid self in order to mock and destabilise the systems that attempt to control her.

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[41] Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, "Performing Hybridity in Post-colonial Monodrama," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 31, no.1 (1997): 5.

[42] Maria C. La Barbera (ed.), *Identity and Migration in Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Springer Nature, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015).

Her hybridity renders her elusive to the clutches of the religious and cultural machinations of control.

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Shifting Dynamics of Safe Spaces for Women in Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Egypt: A Reflection on the Article, "We are not Women, We are Egyptians"

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ABSTRACT
In her article, Nadia Taher (2012) illustrates that, during the Egyptian revolutionary protests that took place during January/February 2011, women were accorded an egalitarian and safe space in Tahrir Square, Cairo, as Egyptians. This is affirmed by Egyptian women who stated, "We are not women, we are Egyptians." For 18 days the women shared the public space with men in protest, demanding social and political transformation from an oppressive regime. No sexual harassment cases were reported during this time – an important fact in a society where, on a daily basis, women are sexually harassed on the streets, depicting an underlying consequence of the patriarchal domination often informed by a Muslim/Islamic religious interpretation. Yet just a month later, in March 2011, for International Women's Day, the dynamics shifted (regressed) where safe public spaces for women as revolutionaries and women as women were once again unsafe and Qur'an waving protesting Muftis leading a group of men, insisted that the women's demands were unjustified and that they "should go back home and to the kitchen." This article reflects on the concept that women are expected to reimagine their gender to be accorded full recognition, participation, and safety in public spaces from within patriarchal frameworks for a limited time or for specific situations. The article proposes that cyberspace can be an alternative safe, public space of recognition, participation, and counterpower beyond patriarchal limitations, not only for revolutionary women, but for women *per se*, yet simultaneously suggesting that, within the post-revolutionary Egyptian state, such safety and power are severely censored.

KEYWORDS
online-offline activism; gender; Egypt; social movements

Introduction

This article, which is partially lifted from my PhD thesis, uses as its starting point, Taher's article, "We are not women, we are Egyptians,"[1] where she suggests that, for Egyptian women, being safe in a public physical/offline space is possible when they act as revolutionaries, but not for women as women. In light of this, I begin by giving an overview of the dynamics of protest spaces for women, starting with the Egyptian

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1   Nadia Taher, "We are not women, We are Egyptians." *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 16, no.3 (2012): 369-76.

uprising (Arab Spring) followed by the predominantly women protests that were held thereafter. In the second part of the article I look at the negotiations of space in respect to Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of patriarchal bargaining. Thereafter I discuss cyberfeminism and cyberactivism in light of the cyberspace vlog (this being a public space within the communication network system/online space) of Asmaa Mahfouz, which is hailed as "the vlog that sparked the Egyptian Revolution" in relation to Saba Mahmood's subversive piety. Finally, I reflect on whether cyberspace can be an alternative safe, public space of recognition, participation, counterpower, and safety beyond patriarchal boundaries, not only for revolutionary women, but for women *per se* and, if such power and reimagining can be retained in post-revolutionary contexts.

Egyptian Revolution: A Synopsis

Historically, Egypt is no stranger to protests – yet a countrywide unified participation (with large-scale protests in which men and large numbers of women protested together) has never occurred. From Huda Sha'a-wari[2] who was one of the first voices in the emerging women's rights arena in the early 1900's, to political antagonisms between secular and religious ideological institutions, Egypt has weathered all forms of protest. In the last two decades, protests in Egypt have been on the increase. Political and social concerns, women's rights, and labour issues have all been core to the demonstrations which were a result of three decades of the Hosni Mubarak regime. Women were visible and active participants in all of these (albeit on a far smaller scale than men), even with the knowledge of the dangers they could incur in a country that publicly and privately hinges its status of nationhood/patriarchy on the honour of women.

The Egyptian Revolution was an uprising where the citizens of Egypt (all classes, genders, religious and age groups) united for a common cause: they demanded a nation free of dictatorship – where poverty and high unemployment could be reduced and human rights (and by extension more effective women's rights) and democratic political elections could be possible. With this came shifting identities and transformations of both individuals and collectives – of who they were and what they wanted for the future. The 6 April Youth Movement was, amongst others, one of the proactive organisations that motivated demonstrations through the use of social media. This organisation was founded in 2008 by a group of

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[2]   Huda Sha'awari founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923.

young educated men and women (Asmaa Mahfouz and Mohammed Adel being two noted founders) who had rallied behind the labour protests in 2008. They were computer savvy activists, as a number of them have received training from the organisation CANVAS (Centre for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies) created by *Otpor's* leader Srdja Popovic of Serbia, who overthrew Slobodan Milosevic in 2000.[3] The basic principles of the organisation were unity, planning, and non-violent discipline for mobilisation, with new communication technologies being the pivotal resource in disseminating these methods.

Negotiations of Offline Space: In Tahrir Square, "We are not women, we are Egyptians"

It therefore happened that the social media were given the credit for enabling, mobilising, and organising the mass demonstrations. On 25 January 2011, millions of Egyptians descended on Tahrir Square (Liberation Square) and stayed for 18 days until Hosni Mubarak stepped down from rule. For the protestors the Square was not a gendered space, but a space of nationalist identity, a space that went beyond gender. This was in direct opposition to how public space is normatively viewed. Men and women voiced and felt the shift in dynamics and identities, as they invoked the cohesive right to occupy the space together. At this point it is important to state that it was the way in which women were seen that invoked this right and that presented the dilemma for continued participation. Said one protestor: "No one sees you as a woman here; no one sees you as a man. We are all united in our desire for democracy and freedom." This was affirmed and extended by a young woman who said to Nadia Taher: "We are not women, we are Egyptians." According to Ng,[4] Egyptian bloggers wrote that male protes-tors praised the women on the frontlines by stating, "You are such a man," indicating that some men permitted the presence of women in the public space because they viewed them at that moment as men.

It is the statement "we are not women" which alerts us to the type of "gendering" (and non-gendering) that occurred in the offline public space of the Square (discussed below).

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[3] Tariq Ramadaan, *The Arab Awakening* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 6; Rose Marie Berger. "Nothing Spontaneous about it," *Sojourners* 40, no.5 (2011): 22, http://sojo.net/magazine/2011/05/nothing-spontaneous-about-it.

[4] Melody Ng, "Contemporary Female Activism: Female Activists and Social Movements in the Cyber-Era," (Master's Thesis, Univesity of California, Berkeley 2012), 41.

Scholars (Egyptians and others) of varying disciplines have written about the misogynist Egyptian society. Public spaces are fraught with dangers for women who walk the streets unaccompanied by male guardians, as they are harassed or sexually assaulted. It is reported that there are numerous (large-scale) daily occurrences of sexual assaults – physically and verbally – of women, and these incidents have increased over the past decade. In an interview, Mona Eltahawy claims that the Egyptian state relies on "three pillars of misogyny: the state itself, the street and the home."[5] El-Ibiary affirms that

> violence against women in Egypt is a socio-cultural political phenomenon, due to a male-dominated culture and a patriarchal authority, as well as deteriorating economic conditions and a widening gap between social classes and categories. It is integral to the wider context of political violence, the struggle over power, as well as the societal acceptance of violence against women.[6]

Moreover, a man's honour, and by extension the family honour, is paramount in the Egyptian society – melded from culture, religion, and state policy. This honour rests on the good conduct of the women in the family household. Thus, if the women venture out alone and are victims of sexual assault, they utimately become the antagonists rather than the victims and bring dishonour to the family. This also bears witness to the public/private dichotomy where the predominant ideological assumption is that a woman's role is within the home, whereas men function in the public sphere. Yet, during those 18 days of protest, it has been stated that women – old, young, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers – were out on the steets with or without male family members, and not a single sexual harassment case was filed. However, these claims have been disputed as it was reported that on the last day of the 18-day protest a case of sexual assault was filed. Some women also indicated that during the protests, women were assaulted and raped by groups of men.[7] Mona

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5   Segolene Allemandou, "Female Emancipation in Egypt 'Can Only Come From Egyptian women'," *France24*, 18 December 2017, https://www.france24.com/en/20171218-women-rights-egypt-emancipation-egyptian-feminists-sisi.

6   Rasha El-Ibiary, "Media Portrayal of Street Violence Against Egyptian Women: Women, Socio-Political Violence, Ineffective Laws and Limited Role of NGOs," *IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication & Film* 4, no.1 (2017): 50, http://iafor.org/archives/journals/iafor-journal-of-media-communication-and-film/10.22492.ijmcf.4.1.04.pdf.

7   Mariz Tadros, "Reclaiming the Streets for Women's Dignity: Effective Initiatives in the Struggle against Gender-Based Violence in between Egypt's Two Revolutions," *Evidence Report* no.48, Institute of Development Studies (2014), 11.

Eltahawy – an activist, journalist, and writer – also reported that she, amongst other women, was sexually assaulted during the protests, which left her with two broken arms. This begs the question then, as to whether women were as safe or gender neutral as is stated by some protestors. Some reports documented that there were indeed many men who, day and night, assisted, facilitated, and protected the presence of women on the Square, thus indicating that a public space had become relatively "safe" for women. Added to that, women shouldered the attacks by the police force, the military, and the state vigilantes together with men. This in itself was marked as an historic shift in the gendered transformations of public space.

Just a month after Mubarak was ousted and to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2011, women planned a gathering in Tahrir Square. This was to celebrate the recent political victory, but also to remind government of women's rights for equality and participation in the constitutional discussions for a new political dispensation. Activists have hoped for large numbers of women to heed the call, yet a mere 300 showed up and they faced a severe backlash from men who were angered by their actions. The women were verbally abused and sexually attacked with interjections like "Go back home and to the kitchen;" "Your demands are unjustified, unnecessary, a threat to the gains of the revolution, out of time, out of place and the product of a 'foreign agenda'." A "sheikh" holding a Qur'an was carried on the shoulders of the protesting men. His performance was to emphasise the idea of the doctrinal authority of the Qur'an in opposition to the actions of the women. That night, women and men who camped out in the Square were arrested, subjected to torture, and beaten. Women who were expected to still be virgins were subjected to virginity tests, as a general of the military authorities said, "They are not like my daughters or yours…they slept alongside men in tents…they had to be given virginity tests."[8] The ideology and practice of the unsafe public space for women was once again at play.

The events of this demonstration did not deter the women and they continued to attend a number of protests over the next few months in 2011. Many citizens were killed and/or injured (mainly men), and in one incident which became a precursor for a following 10,000-strong protest,

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[8]   Taher, "We are not Women," 371; BBC News, "Egypt 'Virginity Tests' Decried," *BBC News*, 1 June 2001, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13620712.

a young woman who was beaten by police, stood up and stripped to her waist revealing her blue bra.[9] The general public opinion that played out in the media was that she as a women should not have been in that space in the first place and girls do not belong at protests, and if they insist on attending, they should be prevented from doing so by force of their male guardians. Her behaviour was questioned, but not that of the police. Patriarchy and honour had returned to the public space. These two protests suggested that women no longer had the capacity or the right to be present in such public offline spaces, as their earlier roles in the mass protest of January 2011 as Egyptians had reverted to their former roles of being women in private spaces – as deemed by men.

However, when the abovementioned 10,000-strong march of women occurred in response to the "blue bra" incident, the women used emotive and qualifying language referring to themselves as mothers and daughters of Egypt: "Daughters of Egypt do not get stripped," they chanted. With this particular protest, the women were treated with re-spect, did not need protection, and received an apology for the attack on the woman with the blue bra – who incidentally became a graffiti symbol of a "Wonder Woman"[10] wearing a blue bra! They demanded the dignity and the rights of the "daughters of Egypt."

From these examples the fluctuating dynamics of the public spaces and the safety of women within those spaces are apparent. In reference to Deniz Kandiyoti's[11] theory of patriarchal bargaining**,** Taher suggests that women are strategising within a given structure of patriarchal constraints specific to their context, to maximise on options that best facilitate an active or passive resistance to their oppression. Furthermore she main-tains that the bargains are not timeless or irreversible but are "sus-

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[9]   It should be noted that the identity of this woman was never revealed, yet she became a symbol of agency for the struggle of women in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

[10]   On 21 October 2016 the United Nations named "Wonder Woman" as the honorary ambassador for the empowerment of women and girls. "Wonder Woman" would be the front for the campaign for women's rights and gender equality with the slogan, "think of all the wonders we can do" (Will Worley, "Wonder Woman Named UN Gender Equality Ambassador, Sparking Backlash," *Independent*, 21 October 2016, http://www.indepen-dent.co.uk/news/world/americas/wonder-woman-un-honorary-ambassador-empower-ment-women-girls-gender-equality-petition-a7374856.html.

[11]   Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2, no.3 (1988): 274-90.

ceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between genders."[12]

Sherine Hafez argues that patriarchal power[13] was seriously challenged both at the private and public levels by the Egyptian Revolution through the presence of a people consciousness where men and women acted together.[14] I take this further by suggesting that, in order for Egyptian women to be part of the "people consciousness," in order to be Egyptians, they renounced being women. They bargained with their womenhood to be accepted within the political climate, as citizens of their country. They raised the collective identity of being Egyptian, or even being called a "man," above that of being women, so that they could enter spaces considered to be unsafe for them. Tahrir Square was a relatively safe public space for the women as revolutionaries and as Egyptian citizens within a specific time frame and for a united reason, but not for women as women, as was demonstrated by the protests and marches which followed after the 18-day protest – and for some women even during the 18-day protest.

Only the "Blue Bra" protest, where the slogan and chants of "Egypt's daughters will not be stripped," had similar success. Women negotiated the patriarchal structure of the Egyptian society by subverting the male conscience to protect the women and female children of Egypt by using a notion of activist mothering.[15] This is a powerful form of activism that is negotiated from the mothering identity, which has put men in a position where their honour was being negotiated within the realms of the Egyptian normative society.

Once Mubarak had been deposed, the "power" of the women was marginalised; they even struggled to find voice and representation in the

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[12] Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," 275.

[13] Sherine Hafez, in her article "No Longer a Bargain: Women, Masculinity, and the Egyptian Uprising" (*American Ethnologist* 39, no.1 [2012]: 37-42), extends the concept of patriarchal bargaining from Kandiyoti's frame of gendered bargaining to include the patriarchal power of Egypt's state leader Mubarak over the Egyptian masses, where he retained a fatherlike position of power over the population.

[14] Hafez, "No longer a bargain," 38.

[15] Nancy A. Naples, "Activist Mothering: Cross-Generational Continuity in the Community Work of Women from Low-Income Urban Neighbourhoods," *Gender and Society* 6, no.3 (1992): 441-63, https://www.jstor.org/stable/189996.

incoming leadership when they were excluded from the committee on constitutional reform. Kandiyoti states:

> Wherever women continue to serve as boundary markers between different national, ethnic, and religious collectivities, their emer-gence as full-fledged citizens will be jeopardised, and whatever rights they may have achieved during one stage of nation-building may be sacrificed on the altar of identity politics during another.[16]

The bargained women's voice and presence that may have been evoked as Egyptian, was eroded and maligned once the objectives of the collective have been realised. Once again, women have lost a footing in the participatory power base of the state. This is well highlighted in the last couple of weeks of October 2015 when elections were reaching their peak in Egypt: during that time the state issued a statement claiming that women who wore revealing or immodest clothing would not be eligible to vote and women who wore the *niqab* (face veil) would need to remove it for identification.[17] This, according to state spokespersons, was neces-sary in terms of respecting traditions. This emphasises the societal pres-sures of the honour of women and their negotiated presence in public spaces as determined by a patriarchal structure.

Cyberactivism, Cyberfeminism, and Social Movements
It was in the 1990s when the EZLN Zapatista movement in Mexico[18] employed the Internet in their social movement against the Zedillo

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[16] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation," *WLUML Dossier* 26 (2004): 45-58.

[17] Ashraf Abdelhameed, "Egyptian Women in 'Revealing Attire to be Banned' from Voting," *Al Arabiya News*, 14 October 2015, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/variety/2015/10/14/Egyptian-women-in-revealing-attire-to-be-banned-from-voting.html.

[18] The EZLN Zapatista movement: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (The Zapatista Army of National Liberation) initiated a protest on 1 January 1994, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect. In San Cristóbal, an indigenous representative of the EZLN read from the opening of "The First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle" to a gathered crowd. The document was in essence a declaration of war against the government of Ernesto Zedillo, and "referred to Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution to justify the people's...inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government." Most importantly, the declaration outlined the 11 demands of Zapatista: jobs, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace (Sheryl Shirley, "Zapatista Organising in Cyber-space: Winning Hearts and Minds?" *Conference of the Latin American Studies* 2001; Adrienne Russell, "Myth and the Zapatista Movement: Exploring a Network Identity," *New Media & Society* 7, no.4 (2005): 559-77, http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.955.8978&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

government, that the use of the Internet for activism for political and social movements started the increasing popularity and effectiveness of such methods where the Internet is harnessed in various emancipatory ways to inform self and others, and to construct new socio-political relations. Kahn and Kellner[19] assert that "the global internet, then, is creating the base and the basis for an unparalleled worldwide anti-war/ pro-peace and social justice movement during a time of terrorism, war, and intense political struggle." Many protests and revolutions since then were successfully executed on the Internet. Leaders of many of these worldwide protests have had training by CANVAS as a result of their success in Serbia.[20]

Cyberfeminism is still considered as a predominantly North or First World development of technological advancement. Gajjala[21] argues that cyber-feminisms have opened up spaces for possibilities and disussions in the Third World using Western technologies, yet the idea of the users in the Third World as the "other" is still implicit in these discussions. She questions whether Internet use will equalise the power structures between North and South, or guarantee the reduction of social, political, or economic injustices faced by those who are "de-empowered"[22] in the world's hierarchical structure. She states that

> [c]yberspace is increasingly marketed as a wonderland where gender, race, and all such markers of otherness will be erased and melted down as we transform ourselves into texts and images online. This view, like the melting pot ideology, fails to point out that it is the "Others" who will be the ones who will need to trans-form themselves into an Anglo-American

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19 Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "New Media and Internet Activism: From the 'Battle of Seattle' to Blogging," *New Media & Society* 6, no.1 (2004): 87-95, http://nms.sage-pub.com.

20 Ramadaan, *The Arab Awakening,* 6.

21 Radhika Gajjala, "'Third World' Perspectives on Cyberfeminism," *Development in Practice* 9, no.5 (1999): 616-9; Radhika Gajjala, "Internet Constructs of Identity and Ignorance: 'Third-World' Contexts and Cyberfeminism," *Works and Days* 33/34, 35/36, 17 and 18 (1999-2000); Radhika Gajjala, "Woman and Other Women: Implicit Binaries in Cyberfeminisms," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11, no.3 (2014); Radhika Gajjala and Annapurna Mamidipudi, "Cyberfeminism, Technology, and Inter-national 'Development'," in *Cyber Selves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women*, ed. Radhika Gajjala (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004), 81-94.

22 Gajjala uses the term "de-empowered" to highlight the stripping away of the identity and indigenous modes of knowledge of the people of the South as backward and traditional in comparison to the ideology of Western expertise and enlightenment (cf. Gajjala, "'Third World' perspectives on cyberfeminism," 1999).

dominated information structure which is dictated by programming languages and nettiquettes laid out from a Eurocentric social, cultural, and political perspective.[23]

Nonetheless, she argues that the idea of cyberfeminism is "to use Internet technologies and to create spaces online that are empowering to women." This occurs at the "intersection of computer technology with subversive feminist counterculture"[24] where possibilities of activism, education, support, and research occur. Surfing the Internet provides an array of vlogs, blogs, YouTube videos, and discussion groups which attest that many women – for the purpose of this discussion, women who identify as Muslim – are appropriating their skills with technology for enabling and empowering women in environments that are politically and religiously restrictive. For women activists, Skalli[25] presents three areas in which the technology is useful: first, it allows a knowledge building capacity outside the restrictions of censorship in a fast and fluid manner; second, it provides a wider range of voices and initiatives locally, nationally, and globally without having to rely on analogue media which are often state controlled, and third, it encourages women to establish far reaching relationships and alliances which can create allies and greater interventions.

For the past decade in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), women have been using the Internet to build support for their work and to disseminate images and information through citizen journalism around social and political issues. This has created a connectivity for women's rights activists where they are able to create alternative ideas around identity politics, citizenship, and political participation in mediated discursive spaces. As a result, women are able to "redefine patriarchal gender roles while questioning the sociocultural, economical, political and legal institutions constraining them."[26]

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23   Gajjala, *Internet Constructs of Identity*, 119.
24   Kira Hall, "Cyberfeminism," in *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*," ed. Susan Herring (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing), 147-72.
25   Loubna H. Skalli, "Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information Technologies in the MENA Region," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2, no.2 (2006): 35-59.
26   Elham Gheytanchi and Valentine N. Moghadam, "Women, Social Protests, and the New Media Activism in the Middle East and North Africa," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 40, no.1 (2014): 1-26.

Words of a Woman: Subversive Piety in Asmaa Mahfouz's Viral Vlog

I propose that the offline occupation of Tahrir Square was a patriarchal and negotiated bargain as compared to Asmaa Mahfouz's subversive "give and take" negotiations in her online vlog. Mahfouz is a techno-millennial, business graduate, and activist who lives within the misogynist restrictions of her society. Using her private space, the Inter-net, and her rage, Mahfouz's vlog was a call for collective action for all Egyptians to descend on Tahrir Square to oppose the Mubarak regime. It was this vlog that went viral on YouTube after she initially uploaded it onto her Facebook page and has been given the credit for sparking the revolution.[27]

Applying Saba Mahmood's concept of subversive piety, Mahfouz masterfully subverts the Egyptian social structures in her vlog. Extolling the pointlessness of the four Egyptians who set themselves alight in a copycat act of Mohammed Bouazzizi of Tunisia, Mahfouz calls for all Egyptians to participate in a protest against the regime. Dressed modest-ly, wearing her *hijab*, and filming from her private space which is considered appropriate for Egyptian women, Mahfouz not only fulfils the Egyptian societal requirements of honour and modesty but presents a strong, bold, and authoritative persona through her presence, voice, and body language on the vlog. Showing her face and providing her contact details in a country where the media is controlled by the state, was a high-risk action that, until then, no other blogger or vlogger had attempt-ed within that political climate. Manuel Castells[28] argues that risk taking behaviour becomes part of the counterpower process when anger against the ruling power supersedes the fear that previously prevented action. Speaking in colloquial Arabic (*ammiya*) to address a wider civilian audience and as an affront to governmental apparatus, she challenges the patriarchal structure throughout her vlog:

> I posted that *I, a girl*, am going *down to Tahrir Square* and *I will stand alone* and I will hold up a banner, *perhaps people will show some honour…If you think yourself a man*, come with me on January 25th.

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27 Melissa Wall and Sahar el Zahed, "'I'll be Waiting for You Guys:' A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1334.

28 Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, UK.: Polity, 2012), 3, 14.

> *Whoever says women shouldn't go to protest because they will get beaten, let him have some honour and manhood* and come with me on January 25th. Whoever says it's not worth it because there will only be a handful of people, I want to tell him you are the reason behind this. And you are a traitor, just like the president or any security cop who beats us in the street…*If you have honour and dignity as a man, come, come and protect me, and other girls in the protest. If you stay at home*, then you deserve all that's being done to you. And *you will be guilty*, before your nation and your people and *you'll be responsible for what happens to us on the street while you sit at home* (emphasis added to indicate the subversive usage of language).[29]

Mahfouz deftly uses the patriarchal context of the Egyptian society to her advantage. She subverts her position in society as a woman to demand the attention of Egyptians, especially men. By addressing men directly, she affirmed that she is just "a girl" and presented them with the opportunity to show "manhood and honour" and dignity by protecting her and any other women who may be on the street protesting. She went even further indicating that if they do not protect them, they will be guilty before the nation and the people. This was a powerful mode of subversive incitement within the cultural/religious structure. Moreover, by employing the use of cyberspace she could speak and be heard. She was able to disrupt the normative male discourses by interpreting her reality in a way which strategised within her constraints. This is a growing strategy where women in the MENA region are occupying the public online space to gain agency and to present positions of counterpower in relatively safe spaces, referred to by Castells as "networks of outrage."[30] Activist Noha Atef states: "[T]o have a space, an online space, to write and talk to people, to give them messages which will increase their anger, this is my favourite way of online activism."[31]

Gheytanchi and Moghadam found that in Iran, online activists had very similar experiences as they felt that cyberspace presented them with "a safe environment to explore new venues and express their feelings of frustration with the status quo."[32]

[29] Wall and el Zahed, "I'll be Waiting for You," 1338-9.
[30] Castells, *Networks of Outrage*, 15.
[31] Miryam Aouragh and Anne Alexander, "The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1348.
[32] Gheytanchi and Moghadam, "Women, Social Protests, and the New Media Activism," 9.

Cyberspace certainly provides a space of immediacy that facilitates the voices of the marginalised, and it enables agency and counterpower particularly for women, without the daily perils of physical societal public space. However, Mahfouz was arrested for her vlog and was to be sentenced to a year in prison. Civil protests averted her imprisonment, but a travel ban was placed upon her. Many online activists, both women and men, faced similar challenges and threats. This has also occurred in other countries such as Iran, Libya, and Tunisia. This suggests that cyberspace as part of the Internet is an empowering tool for cyber-activism and cyberfeminism, but that it carries its own set of challenges.

Egypt's Post-Revolutionary Cyberspace: Where do We Go from Here?

The al-Sisi government has approved and implemented laws such as the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law in August 2018 and the Media Regulation Law in July 2018. These laws give the government broad ranging power to regulate and restrict freedom of expression on the Internet and to jail online activists whom the government deems to be threats to the state. In addition, counterterrorism and state of emergency laws enable the court to prosecute bloggers and online activists for peaceful criticism.[33] These regulations provide the Supreme Council for Media Regulations the power to put citizens with more than 5,000 followers on social media, with personal blogs, or websites under state supervision. This power also extends to blocking or suspending any personal accounts which the state considers to be fake news or criticism. Rights activists argue that this is a method of crushing dissent by bloggers and online activists.[34] In 2013, Alaa Abdel Fattah, an online activist and blogger who was also part of the 2011 Egyptian uprising, was arrested and jailed by the al-Sisi state. He was just one of apparently thousands who have been arrested and imprisoned, although al-Sisi has denied such activities. Another activist who was detained was Amal Fathi in May 2018, after she posted a video (taken on her smartphone) on Facebook, criticizing sexual harassment in Egypt. Her

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[33] Khaled Desouki, "Egypt: Events of 2018," *Human Rights Watch*, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/egypt.

[34] NewsWires, "Egypt's Sisi Ratifies Law to Clamp Down on Social Media," 2 September 2018, *France24*, https://www.france24.com/en/20180902-egypt-sisi-ratifies-law-clamp-down-social-media-internet.

crime was said to be "spreading false news" and "inciting regime change."[35]

An Egyptian online activist, Omayma, who is presently exiled in the Netherlands, says that "the new generation of feminists is smarter than the government thinks. This generation grew up with technology, they are used to it. We all have smartphones and can record videos. That is threatening to the government."[36] She suggests that it is dangerous in Egypt even in the online space; yet she, as others, are constantly trying to achieve change because "not only the government likes to keep women small, it is also ingrained in society." Some Egyptian journalists have been sentenced to years in jail, whilst others like Fattah, Wael Ghonim, and Asraa Abdel Rattah – also known as the "Facebook Girl"[37] – have been released, albeit under restrictive conditions. Online activists continue to push the boundaries and find alternatives in this circum-venting censorship, both on the Internet and on other mediated spaces in the more recent Egyptian political and social milieu, even though the Egyptian cyberspace does not guarantee any sense of safety for the users, neither female nor male. Nonetheless, as Omayma states, for her, the Arab Spring was a moment of clarity, and since then "I have the feeling that my life can change every moment and that I can also change the lives of others." On the other hand, Asmaa Mahfouz argues that the Egypt under al-Sisi is undergoing a counter-revolution and that it is far more dangerous to be engaged in activism – both online and offline – under the present leadership than it was under Mubarak.[38]

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[35] AFP, "Egypt Activist Urges Sisi to Pardon Detained Wife,*" News24*, 3 January 2019, https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/egypt-activist-urges-sisi-to-pardon-detained-wife-20190103-2.

[36] Noemi Prent, "Meet Omayma, Women's Rights Activist in Turbulent Egypt," *ATRIA, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History*, 9 October 2018, https://institute-genderequality.org/news-publications/feminism/feminism-21st-century/meet-omayma-womens-rights-activist-in-turbulent-egypt/.

[37] The "Facebook Girl" is Asraa Abdel Rattah who used social media to organise and support public protests in Egypt, including the textile workers strike in 2008 for which she was detained. She also facilitated the 2011 Arab Spring protests (cf. MLDI, "Case of Fearless Egyptian Internet Activist Esraa Abdel Fattah [Aka 'Facebook Girl'] Taken up by International Legal Team," *MLDI*, https://www.mediadefence.org/news/case-fearless-egyptian-internet-activist-esraa-abdel-fattah-aka-%E2%80%9Cfacebook-girl%E2%80%9D-taken).

[38] Orla Guerin, "Revolution a Distant Memory as Egypt Escalates Repression," *BBC News*, 9 December 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-30381292.

Conclusion

Although Mahfouz's actions were exceedingly dangerous in respect of governmental retaliation, her presence in the public online space was relatively safe as compared to the presence of women in an offline public space within Egypt. Mahfouz did not bargain her womanhood within cyberspace in order to assert her Egyptian nationality or Muslim identity. In the online space pre-protest, during the protest and post-protest, she was not confronted with the normative patriarchal responses that develop in offline public spaces. However, given that she was arrested, attests that complete safety in cyberspace is not guaranteed. Even though "flaming" can occur, ethics can be flouted, censorship is a real threat, and imprisonment is possible in some countries, cyberspace is a possible alternative to enable agency and power/counterpower for women. It has enabled women activists to facilitate a network through offline and online debates which has contributed to what Moghadam and Sidiqi refer to as the "feminization of the public sphere."[39] Egypt's first female judge and the vice president of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Ehany el Gibaly avers: "Women should not wait to be invited. It is time for them to perform their rights."[40]

I therefore conclude that cyberspace can be an alternative safe, public space of recognition, participation, counterpower and safety within negotiated feminisms and possibly beyond patriarchal limitations, not only for revolutionary women, but for women *per se,* and that with more nationwide access to cyberspace and with more time, such power and reimaginings can be retained in post-revolutionary contexts. However, this can only be possible where state laws are not implemented to censor the Internet and the media.

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[39] Valentine M. Moghadam and Fatima Sadiqi, "Women and the Public Sphere in the Middle East and North Africa," *Special Issue of Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2*,* no.2 (2006): 1-7, https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/13236.

[40] Hafez, "No Longer a Bargain," 41.

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