

## Editorial

### Sarojini Nadar<sup>1</sup> and Fatima Seedat<sup>2</sup>

As a journal, we are committed to exploring the multiple and complex ways in which power operates in gendered relationships – particularly when those relationships intersect with religion and culture. This issue of the journal explores these operations of power through the agency of women and men within religious and cultural discourses. They challenge the ways in which power is conceived, its location and the possibilities for discursive interventions for constructing gendered forms of agency.

Amongst the questions raised in this discussion are the locations of power in feminist analysis. In this vein, Pralini Naidoo's analysis of representations of the 'Hindu goddess' in South Africa asks us to consider the ways in which feminist analysis privileges *shakti* or fierce over *bhakti* or benign forms of power, when she examines the constructs of Kali and Draupadi as counterfoils to Parvati, Saraswati and Laxmi, in local *Amman* and *Brahmanic* traditions. Her concern that the ways in which the goddess is theorised in mainstream feminist analysis does not reflect in the lived realities of Hindu women raises the possibilities for "*bhakti* or devotion within the context of Hinduism as a possibility for liberation". Her concluding analysis leaves us with questions about agency as autonomous activity; namely is it possible that the ordinary believer does not find the power associated with liminal positionalities and revenge as liberating as power associated with spiritual devotion?

A second question pertains to the locations of power in the lives of queer individuals; Janine Carlse takes us through the ways in which the power of the state, the rhetorical power of cultural relevance and the structural power of social location are used to circumscribe sexual agency. The lives of black lesbian women are circumscribed, for Janine Carlse, by three forms of denial; an historical imperial denial offset by apartheid

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<sup>1</sup> Sarojini Nadar (PhD) is a full professor at the University of the Western Cape where she also holds the Desmond Tutu Research Chair. The Chair focuses on developing and supporting advanced research in the area of religion and social transformation in Africa. She was a co-founder of the Gender and Religion program at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2002 which she headed until 2016. Her numerous publications span diverse topics of research at the intersections of gender studies and religion, including gender based violence, HIV, masculinity studies and, most recently, gender in higher education.

<sup>2</sup> Fatima Seedat (PhD Islamic Law, McGill) holds a Senior Lectureship in Gender Studies at the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics at the University of Cape Town (UCT) where her long term project is concerned with the convergence of historical and traditional constructions of sex difference with contemporary gender norms and legal paradigms.

sexual policing, a denial using arguments for African authenticity, and a conceptual denial evident in Euro-American discourses of 'coming out'. After outlining the last two of these, Janine Carlse presents the work of two creative black feminist women through which she reads their fight against the injustice of homophobic hate speech and hate crimes. Through the photographic voice of Zanele Muholi and the writing practices of *sangoma* Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, she highlights their efforts to "educate and build black lesbian communities. Muholi and Nkabinde "provide examples of how reimaginings and negotiations of lesbian identities in (South) Africa are at once complex and essential."

Recognition of the complexity of gendered power, beyond hasty advocacy strategies, is the concern Tinyiko Maluleke raises in his essay, *Of Wounded Killers and 'Failed Men': Broadening the Quest for Liberating African Masculinities*. He also makes the argument that: "scholarship on masculinity in Africa – especially scholarship on religion and masculinity, beyond interventionist and advocacy works - remains sparse and inadequate." Ironically, in this issue of the journal three essays, including Maluleke's own, feature scholarship on religion and masculinity.

Maluleke makes a strong case for why pieces of fiction, like Thando Mgqolozana's , *A man who is not a man*, provide important data sources for how religion and culture construct and deconstruct masculinities, and "sacralise" practices that keep hegemonic masculinity intact, but also subvert and support subordinate masculinities. Maluleke pleads for an inter-disciplinary masculinity studies that moves beyond the conventional "sacred texts" as sites for exploration, and for a theological masculinity studies that lingers with the difficult task of understanding the complexity of gender performance, rather than one that concludes with hasty "intervention and advocacy" strategies.

Such "intervention strategies" may very well be present in the essay by Chitando and Kilonzo who seem to find in Pentecostalism a space where an alternative masculinity can be nurtured, via the biblical text of Proverbs 31. In their essay, *Towards a "Proverbs 31 Man"? Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Masculinities in Kenya*, while noting the gender contradictions in their argument, nevertheless make a case for the ways in which Pentecostalism holds potential to destabilise hegemonic masculinity.

A final question, raised by Rosinah Gabaitse and others, pertains to the cultivation of masculinities in women-only spaces. Their essay entitled *Reproducing or Creating a New Male? Bridal showers in the urban*

*space in Botswana* also finds an unlikely space for the cultivation of “redemptive masculinities.” While bridal showers can conventionally be conceptualised as spaces where femininities are socially, culturally and religiously constructed for the purpose of marriage, Gabaitse *et al* argue that they can also be spaces where masculinities are created, contested and negotiated. Through a study of 18 bridal showers over a period of 15 months in Botswana, and using Connell’s analytical framing of hegemonic, subordinate and subversive masculinities, the authors conclude that bridal showers hold the potential to nurture anti-hegemonic masculinities.

Collectively, these essays speak to ways in which gendered forms of agency in religious communities are not easily decoded and require attention to the multiple intersections of social, political and cultural location.