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Book Review

Her Heart Lies at the Feet of the Mother: Transformations of the Romance Plot in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*

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ABSTRACT
Sudanese-British writer, Leila Aboulela's novel, *Minaret* (2005) transforms the plot structure of Western literary and popular romance forms and develops further the plotlines of African-American Muslim romance novels. It does so by foregrounding the dissenting mother as obstruction to the union of the hero and heroine, against the backdrop of the unique status of the mother in Islam. Thus, the ending of the novel is neither happy nor tragic. Instead, the lovers are separated, and closure requires reconciliation on the part of the couple with the concerns of the mother. In addition, because of the significant difference in age, the heroine is in some ways like a mother to the hero. Final contentment of the heroine is undermined by her questionable actions at the end, resulting in psychic and spiritual contraction. The novel is therefore opened up to ambiguity and uncertainty in the closure, notwithstanding the faith of the heroine. The specific form which closure takes, is determined by the dissenting mother as obstruction in Islamic romance.

KEYWORDS
Aboulela; romance; Islam; mother; Islamic feminism

Introduction

Sudanese-British author, Leila Aboulela, is established in the world and commonwealth Anglophone literature networks as a writer of what has come to be termed "halal" fiction. Unlike many writers who describe themselves as "culturally" Muslim, incorporating Muslim characters and Islamic settings in their fiction, Aboulela's work is deeply informed and shaped by the Islamic ethos of a practicing Muslim. In this respect, given her prominence in contemporary world literature, Aboulela is often contrasted with Salman Rushdie, whose artistic project fundamentally undermines Islamic worldviews in all their various contemporary manifestations. Aboulela's fiction has significantly furthered literary debates around questions of translation, migrant writing, and religion in the contemporary postsecularist moment of Euramerican cultures. Since Aboulela's fictions embody powerful female subjectivities, her work has elicited an interest from a feminist perspective, especially concerning how Islamic feminism may be distinguished from feminist individualism. Even though feminist individualism may challenge some patriarchal

Enlightenment assumptions, it is epistemologically grounded in the central ideals of the European Enlightenment.

This article draws on many of these currents in Aboulela scholarship through a study of the romance plot in her second novel, *Minaret*.[1] This essay argues that, against the backdrop of a predominant interest in the politics of gendered romantic relationships in her oeuvre, *Minaret* engages and significantly transforms the dominant plot structures of Western literary and popular romance forms through underscoring the significance of the dissenting mother in Islamic romance. The dissenting mother in Islamic romance may represent a major obstacle to the union of beloveds. The centrality of obstruction in the romance narrative was first proposed in a Western literary and cultural context by Denis de Rougement.[2] However, what De Rougement proposes for Western archetypal romance narratives is cross-culturally and cross-historically true for romance narratives. Furthermore, the complexity of plotlines in African-American Muslim popular romance as discussed by Layla Abdullah-Poulos,[3] is developed further through the figure of the dissenting mother presented in *Minaret*. Abdullah-Poulos suggests that the popular African-American Muslim romance depends, for a successful resolution, on the existence of a "Stable Love Triangle" with God at the apex.

This essay suggests that in Muslim romance, the dissenting mother may be a major and recurring obstruction to the resolution, and that the union of the beloveds crucially depends on the mother's approval. The "Stable Love Triangle" may therefore also need to include the mother at a point below the ultimate apex represented by God. Since the mother in *Minaret* resolutely rejects the romantic relationship to the end, closure in the novel is radically destabilised. For this reason, one may conclude that

1 Leila Aboulela, *Minaret* (New York: Black Cat, 2005).

2 Denis de Rougement, *Love in the Western World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983). For De Rougement, the major romance myth which informs the Western culture is the story of Tristan and Isolde, which is a narrative about obstacles to union, finally ending in death. The Tristan myth has a precursor in the Persian romance of Vis and Ramin, and in romances from many other cultures, defined by obstructions to union.

3 Layla Abdullah-Poulos, "The Stable Muslim Love Triangle – Triangular Desire in African American Muslim Romance Fiction," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 7 (2018).

Aboulela does not endorse, as a number of critics suggests, a "quietist"[4] resolution "lioniz[ing]…the Islamically devout and observant – against… the profane and the unbelievers."[5] Instead, at its end, the novel opens up to uncertainty and ambiguity, except for the certainty of profound belief in Divine love, and the ongoing yearning for paradoxical liberation in the Divine embrace. The novel achieves this outcome by introducing the figure of the mother in the romance plot, a figure that becomes as significant as the romantic heroine herself. By foregrounding the mother, the idealisation of wish-fulfilment, conventionally achieved in the closure of the classic romance plot is necessarily relinquished. The article is informed by theories and debates in cultural-historical studies of romantic love, and examines the novel through a comparative analysis of its plot, detailed through literary close reading, which highlights elements of characterisation and linguistic style, relevant to the argument.

Aboulela's first novel, *The Translator*[6] is an index of the importance that she attaches to romance. *The Translator*, more than any of Aboulela's subsequent novels, has had the biggest impact in postcolonial and African literary circles, also being listed as one of the *New York Times*

[4] Eva Hunter hesitates on the ending of *Minaret*, which sees the protagonist withdrawing into apparent spiritual self-isolation, rather than committing to outward action like Marxism or feminism. This dichotomy, I believe, is false since the withdrawal occurs in a space of doubt, and the dispelling thereof will hopefully come through the performance of the Hajj, where the rituals are a physical embodiment of Islamically modulated feminist and socialist ideals and actions. The heroine ought thereafter to "live her Hajj," incorporating these ideals into her everyday life. See Eva Hunter, "The Muslim 'Who Has Faith' in Leila Aboulela's Novels *Minaret* (2005) and *Lyrics Alley* (2009)," *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 25, no.1 (2013): 88-99.

[5] Peter Morey argues that the novel as a form has never fully been able to shed its partial origins from Christianity, therefore, incompletely becoming the cultural embodyment of secularism. For this reason, Aboulela's attempt to communicate the experience of (Islamic monotheistic) faith, is not entirely misplaced in the novel. The "communalist" solution that Morey finds at the conclusion of the novel will cause critics less unease, he suggests, read in relation to Canadian literary scholar, Northrop Frye's Christian-influenced theory of "archetypes." Up to this point, the argument is persuasive. However, the assumption that the ending is "communalist," clearly and unproblematically pitting believers against unbelievers, effaces the anguish of the protagonist who, to the end remains deeply uncertain whether she is embraced by God and whether she really is a true believer. The narrative significantly strips the heroine of any self-righteousness through exposing her fallibilities and inconsistencies at the end (Peter Morey, "'Halal Fiction' and the limits of postsecularism: Criticism, critique and the Muslim in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 53, no. 2 [2018]: 301-35).

[6] Leila Aboulela, *The Translator* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1999).

100 Most Notable Books of the Year. The genre conventions and plot of *The Translator* bring to prominence the potential that Aboulela seems to identify in romantic love to draw together diasporic subjects. Romance is heavily tasked to unite subjects in a contemporary globalised world order, which in recent decades has been sharply polarised by Islamophobia.

In *The Translator*, the young, recently widowed heroine, Sammar, acts as a translator of Arabic texts into English for Rae Isles, a Scottish Middle-Eastern historian and lecturer in postcolonial politics. However, Sammar is a translator of more than just one language into another. She translates cultures and epistemologies in her efforts to understand her Scottish hosts, and to be understood by them. She is attracted to Rae but, as a woman of Islamic faith, cannot fulfil her desires outside of marriage, and marriage is not a possibility, as Rae professes to be agnostic. Sammar's commitment to faith is such that she cannot conceive of marrying Rae unless he embraces Islam. The couple's union is achieved only at the end of the novel when Sammar transforms her desire. Her prayers no longer are selfish – for Rae to become Muslim so that she can marry him. Instead, Rae becomes Muslim for his own sake, recognising the virtues of Islam and thus bringing down the obstacle of his religious indifference that formerly divided them. The romantic union of the heroine and hero operates allegorically to suggest the potential union of the East-West, North-South, Europe-Africa divide of contemporary geo-political power imbalances. The love story in *The Translator* is the most well-known and most debated romantic relationship of the intimacies that occur in virtually all of Aboulela's works.

Emily Davis, in *Rethinking the Romance Genre: Global Intimacies in Contemporary Literary and Visual Culture* identifies a tension in the reception, particularly of postcolonial women's writings, when novels adopt the conventions of genre fiction, especially the romance plot.[7] Davis refers to the discussion surrounding the nomination for the 1999 Booker Prize of *The Map of Love*, Ahdaf Soueif's grand Egyptian historical "political romance," which bears many similarities to Aboulela's *The Translator*. Davis suggests:

[7] Emily Davis, *Rethinking the Romance Genre: Global Intimacies in Contemporary Literary and Visual Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

> Critics' responses to the novel varied widely, but one common thread ran through nearly all of the reviews: a profound unease with the novel's combination of romance and politics. For critics, the genres of the romance and the political novel functioned as two mutually exclusive and thus irreconcilable traditions, and their reviews tended either to valorize the novel's political content and criticize its formulaic romance or to celebrate the romance as an escape from the realities of the book's political commentary and an indulgence in the guilty pleasures of mass-market fiction.[8]

The romance elements in Aboulela's fiction are so noticeable that some critics have analysed *The Translator* as an example of the "chick lit" subgenre of popular romance, albeit with "a resistant aesthetic that draws attention to the sexism found both in traditional cultural mores and consumer-driven neoliberal gender regimes, offering faith and spirituality as a model for more equitable gender relations."[9] Aboulela's work has therefore significantly broken down the divide between elitist conceptions of "serious" literature, and popular romance, exposing the dialectical and productive relations between realism and genre fiction, like romance.

Aboulela's interest in love and marriage draws her work into a constellation of writing by other African women writers, beginning in the twentieth century with the Nigerian, Flora Nwapa, and including also the Senegalese Mariama Bâ, the South African Bessie Head, the Egyptian Ahdaf Soueif, and most importantly the Ghanaian writer, Ama Ata Aidoo. Of all the writers mentioned, Aidoo is the author who reflects most consciously on the significance of love in an African socio-political context. Recognising the distinctiveness of Aboulela's literary negotiations of romantic love, no doubt, played a role in the inclusion of Aboulela as a contributing author in *African Love Stories*, the short story anthology edited by Aidoo. This anthology draws together the short fiction of many prominent African women writers.[10]

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8 Davis, *Rethinking the Romance Genre*, 1.

9 Lucinda Newns, "Renegotiating romantic genres: Textual resistance and Muslim chick lit," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 53, no.2 (2017): 284.

10 Ama Ata Aidoo suggests in his introduction that literature and its scholarship have not devoted sufficient attention to romantic love in the African context, since economic and political issues have always seemed more urgent (Ama Ata Aidoo [ed.], *African Love Stories: An Anthology* [Banbury: Ayebia, 2012]).

Aboulela brings a vast range of traditions of romantic love into her fiction, inflecting them in ways both idiosyncratic to her personal experience and vision, but also reflecting what may be more general trends emerging in African and Islamic interpretations of eros. Aboulela clarifies the influence of the Anglo-American romance tradition through her reading of the Western classics, which formed part of her formal education. She suggests, for example, that the "courtship rituals of modern-day Muslims can be found in a Jane Austen novel."[11] She elaborates further that as a teenager, she read Daphne du Maurier's popular classic romance novel, *Rebecca*, and also *Jane Eyre*, the canonical nineteenth-century domestic romance by Charlotte Brontë. She admits to being struck by how fully Christian the romance plots of novels like *Jane Eyre* are:

> In these nineteenth-century novels that I had read as a child, I noticed that Christianity was extremely embedded in the work. I still see it there, and I think that maybe other readers don't really notice it because they take it for granted. I have often given this example of *Jane Eyre*: the plot hinges on the fact that Mr Rochester can't marry Jane because he's married to Bertha. He can't even divorce Bertha. It's one of the most un-Islamic plots that you'd ever get! And it is not secular, it is Christian in that Jane whole-heartedly believes that it is wrong for her to be Mr Rochester's second wife, and Charlotte Bronte must kill off Bertha in order to pave the way for a happy ending. Indeed, this is Christian justice at work: Jane who is good wins everything and Mr Rochester is punished by losing his eyesight. There is a lot of faith in *Jane Eyre*, a lot of spirituality – at the same time it is specifically Christian, and reading it as a Muslim I am acutely aware of this. So, I often think that if western literature accommodated Christianity so well then perhaps it can, too, accommodate Islam. And yes I am writing back to that Anglocentric tradition which is also Christian: I am putting Islam in the English novel.[12]

It is therefore clear that Aboulela quite consciously adapts European romance conventions, strongly shaped by a Christian ethos, to reflect

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[11] Leila Aboulela, "Restraint? Sure. Oppression? Hardly," *Washington Post*, 22 July 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/20/AR2007072002147.html.

[12] C.E. Rashid, "Islamic Individualism and the Logic of the Narrative: An Interview with Leila Aboulela," *Interventions* 14, no.4 (2012): 619.

Islamically informed personal relations. If Jane in *Jane Eyre* had been Muslim, the romance plot would have been influenced by an Islamic code, allowing her to marry Rochester and be the second wife without the narrative having to kill off Bertha Mason, the creole first wife. Otherwise, Rochester would have been able to divorce Bertha Mason, following the three-staged separation which seeks to ensure that a marriage, which is still viable is not sundered.

Aboulela's own novels also adapt other romance conventions within an Islamic ethos. Her work reflects a strong consciousness and transformation of the masculine postcolonial inflections of classic European tales of love. *The Translator* cites and alludes to Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*,[13] which rewrites Shakespeare's *Othello*, parodying the "Moorish" demon lover trope embodied in its Sudanese male protagonist. Unlike Salih's hero who wreaks revenge on white men through destroying white women, Aboulela's heroine symbolically overcomes hierarchies and divisions through loving the open-hearted "coloniser." Aboulela's narratives are also informed by, or read through the lens of the romance classics of Arab and Islamic culture. These include the tales of Yusuf (Joseph) and Zulaikha (Potiphar's wife) from the monotheistic scriptures, and Laila and Majnun from the Arab oral tradition. Aboulela herself is often likened to Scheherezade, the astute wife of King Shahriyar of *The Thousand and One Nights*, who rewrites an oppressive and violent gender script through her stories.

No doubt, Aboulela is aware of and influenced by popular romances in Arabic, as she might be of thriving Urdu popular romances in Pakistan and other predominantly Muslim countries like Malaysia, and closer to "home," the Soyayya popular romances of the Hausa of Northern Nigeria. These popular print romances have also, in part, encouraged and shaped the development of local film industries with televised romance series and films, now globally distributed through online streaming services. Many of the Muslim romance trends in Aboulela's fiction are reflected in these cultural traditions and genres, for example, explorations of the "cousin-love" and "cousin-arranged marriages," traditionally encouraged in many of these Islamic cultures. However, the scholarship of these texts and visual narratives is still in its infancy, and very little is available in an English scholarly context. The analysis of

[13] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969).

Minaret to follow, which foregrounds the figure of the mother, further develops the Islamic pattern privileging Divine love, identified by Abdullah-Poulos in the growing number of African-American Muslim popular romances.

Reading *Minaret* through the Romance Plot

Minaret is a first-person realist narrative about Najwa, a Sudanese woman who finds herself in lonely penury in London in the early 2000s. The novel consists of six parts and allows the narrative to flash backwards to key moments from its present time (2003-2004) to Najwa's privileged youthful years in Khartoum as the daughter of a wealthy government minister (1984-1985), and in London, describing her family's dismal exile (1989-1991) after a Marxist coup in the Sudan in which her father is executed. As a young person in Khartoum, Najwa enjoys the social, cultural, and educational advantages of the postcolonial elite throughout the developing world. These are lost when Najwa, her mother, and twin brother, Omar have to flee to London after her father is hanged. The family manages to retain a semblance of middle-class comfort for a while. However, the mother's hospital bills for leukaemia deplete their resources and they lose face with the Sudanese community when the brother, Omar who had already developed a drug habit in Khartoum, is arrested and imprisoned for stabbing a police officer in a drug raid. Najwa is generally conformist, compliant, and unambitious, expecting life to take the natural course for someone of her standing – marriage to someone approved by her parents, followed by raising children. Untrained for any profession, her steady slide begins, seeing her finally working as a maid in order to survive.

Najwa is a habitual outsider to her own life. As a young person, she is distanced from herself and envies the full existential immersion that she observes in unsophisticated fellow college students and the poor servants who work for the family. The people whom she watches and secretly envies, seem to have a contentment and sense of fellow-feeling, through a collective performance of the daily Islamic rituals and other religious obligations, absent among her well-to-do, cosmopolitan set. She observes the same sense of completeness and fulfilment among the multinational group of women whom she meets at the Regent's Park mosque in London. Her desire for spiritual self-realisation leads her to the full practice of Islam. She also begins to wear the hijab. It is Najwa's inspired belief in Islam that causes her attraction to Tamer, the young

brother of PhD student, Lamya, in whose apartment she comes to work as a maid, and as a nanny to Lamya's toddler, Mai.[14]

Most studies of romance fiction present a "morphology" of the essential structures or features of the romance plot. Generally, these are versions of the same thing. For the purposes of this essay, the eight essential plot elements identified by Pamela Regis, a major scholar of the romance novel, will be used as a point of departure for the analysis of the romance plot. For Regis, the romance novel is a liberating female script:[15] Regis stresses, in addition, that the plot elements are not sequential and may occur in various orders in specific narratives.

> Eight narrative events take a heroine in a romance novel from encumbered to free. In one or more scenes, romance novels always depict the following: the initial state of society in which heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between the heroine and hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal. These elements are essential. In addition, the romance novel may include scenes depicting a scapegoat exiled, [and] bad characters converted to goodness.[16]

Although Regis does not elaborate on it, the "scapegoat" often may take the form of an anti-hero or secondary hero against whom the hero's virtues may be compared, even where the hero has "rough edges" which are smoothed through interaction with the heroine as the narrative progresses. The relationship between Najwa and Tamer contains all of these elements, but because *Minaret* is a "story about love" rather than a "love story," it does not end with the union of the heroine and hero.[17]

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[14] Lamya and her philandering husband, Hisham, are estranged in a distant relationship which sees Lamya studying on her own in London.

[15] This may be contrasted with the view going back to Simone de Beauvoir of romantic love as patriarchally oppressive.

[16] Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 30.

[17] The Nigerian Hausa Anglophone writer, Abubakar A. Ibrahim, makes the distinction between the "love story" and the "story about love" in discussing his novel *Season of Crimson Blossoms*. See Abubakar A. Ibrahim, Africa in Words, 2015 Africa Writes #P&P – Q&A with author and Africa Writes guest Abubakar Adam Ibrahim, *Africa in*

Neither does it end tragically with the death or metaphorical destruction of the heroine and hero. Instead, the ending, where the obstruction presented by the mother seems insurmountable, is a complex dialectic of desires both fulfilled and unfulfilled for the heroine and hero, but where, relatively speaking, the heroine emerges worse off.

Referring to Regis's plot elements, Aboulela defines the London society in which Najwa, the heroine, and Tamer, the hero, find themselves as a society which is unwelcoming to immigrants, especially post-9/11, hostile to *Muslim* immigrants. Able to compare life before donning the hijab, to life after adopting the hijab, Najwa is keenly aware of the differences in the way she is perceived. Before wearing the hijab, when she passes a group of builders on scaffolding, she luxuriates in their wolf-whistles and admiration of her sexiness – like Diana Ross, she suggests about her hair and her style.[18] By contrast, when she wears the hijab, the streets of London become threatening to her. Using public transport, she tries to catch buses with conductors on them so that she feels safer. On one occasion, three young thugs are abusive, shouting, "You Muslim scum," dousing her with their soft drink.[19] Thus, the Islamic sartorial modesty, which is part of Najwa's conscious self-actualisation, is viewed in Islamophobic Britain as a marker of Islam as a threat.

Najwa's first person narrative also makes her readers aware of how the presence of the hero is interpreted by the host population. Because of the awkwardness of their relationship, Najwa and Tamer never go out alone together. Instead, Tamer joins Najwa when she takes Mai out for walks. They feel most comfortable in parks with other immigrant nannies and children, since there, Tamer is not viewed with suspicion. Outside of the safe zone of the parks, Najwa senses "the slight unease he inspires in the people around [them…She] turn[s] and look[s] at him through their eyes. [He is t]all, young, Arab-looking, dark eyes and the beard, just like a terrorist."[20] The society in which the couple finds themselves is therefore one in which they are marginalised, in which they are viewed as a threat, and which is threatening to them. Their relationship, unlike

Words, 2020, https://africainwords.com/2020/07/04/2015-africa-writes-pp-qa-with-author-and-africa-writes-guest-abubakar-adam-ibrahim/. Also see Abubakar A. Ibrahim, *Season if Crimson Blossoms* (Abuja: Cassava Republic Press, 2017).

18 Aboulela, *Minaret*, 130-1.

19 Aboulela, *Minaret*, 80-1.

20 Aboulela, *Minaret*, 100.

the cross-cultural relationship and marriage of Sammar and Rae in *The Translator*, is not a relationship which would redress the perception of their community in the eyes of the host society, even if their union were to be achieved.

The first meeting of the romance hero and heroine, which represents another one of Regis' plot elements, introduces the reader to the essence of their personalities, the spark of their attraction, and the central tension which will develop in the course of their relationship. *Minaret* begins with a prelude, started with the *Bismillah*,[21] the invocation which prefaces all significant actions of Muslims. The prelude foreshadows the obstruction to their relationship even before it presents the first encounter of the heroine and hero. It begins with autumn in London. The heroine is about to meet her new employer at the employer's apartment for the first time. Najwa orients herself against the minaret of the Regent's Park mosque as she walks to the apartment block and meditates on the experience of the seasons of the year in London: "London is at its most beautiful in autumn. In summer it is seedy and swollen, in winter it is overwhelmed by Christmas lights and in spring, the season of birth, there is always disappointment. Now it is at its best, now it is poised like a mature woman whose beauty is no longer fresh but still surprisingly potent."[22]

In this opening sequence, Najwa projects her effaced appreciation of her own physical attractions onto the city of London. At the heart of the sense of herself is the fact that she is still desirable, despite her age. Although we are never told exactly how old she is, she does observe when she first meets Tamer's mother, Doctora Zeinab, that she "could not be more than ten years older than Najwa."[23] In other words, Najwa is old enough to be the nineteen-year-old Tamer's mother. Because she is old enough to be his mother, Tamer's own mother refuses to accept the relationship, representing the obstacle which leads to the end of the relationship and the complex ending of the novel.

Although there are no strong textual allusions to the Qur'anic story of Yusuf and Zulaikha, which also occurs with variations in the Judeo-

[21] *Bism Allahi, Ar-rahman, Ar-raheem* (*In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful*) (Aboulela, *Minaret,* 1).
[22] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 1.
[23] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 71.

Christian tradition, there are many similarities with *Minaret*. Najwa, like Zulaikha, is the older desiring woman attracted to a young, virtuous innocent. She is the partner in the relationship who is shown sometimes to use her greater life and sexual experience playfully to manipulate and tease Tamer. Even though there is another equally significant difference between them, namely, that they do not enjoy an equal social standing, since Najwa is a maid, the crucial difference in the context of this romance is age.

The foreshadowing of obstruction prefaces the meeting of the heroine and hero. Najwa and Tamer meet when Najwa is fumbling with the elevator buttons, trying to go up to Lamya's apartment for the first time. She is instantly attracted to Tamer's eyes, the proverbial pathway to the soul, which are "liquid brown," shining not with "intelligence" like the eyes of Anwar, her previous lover, but with "intuition." The moment is charged with an erotico-spiritual intensity which has Najwa musing: "I have heard the saying that you can smell Paradise on the young." And when Tamer walks out of the building, this momentary time-out-of-time reverts to the mundane – "everything goes back to normal again."[24] The first meeting thus starkly contrasts the difference in age between the heroine and hero. Najwa is old enough to be Tamer's mother and, as will be suggested when the plot element of the barrier is discussed, makes her sensitive to Doctora Zeinab's claims as the biological mother.

Regarding the plot element of the attraction, Regis outlines that this is a "scene, or series of scenes scattered throughout the novel [which] establishes for the reader the reason that this couple must marry. [The attraction, furthermore,] keeps the heroine and hero involved long enough to surmount the barrier."[25] Because *Minaret* is a story about love rather than a love story, the barrier in this narrative is never overcome, and the couple's wishes are never fulfilled – desire is not transformed into pleasure. Ironically, it is precisely spirituality and the belief in an Islamic ethic which constitute the attraction of the couple. However, the Islamic ethic which also privileges the mother, ironically constitutes the dissenting mother as obstruction to the romance. The prior claims of the mother in Islam override the claims of the lover.

[24] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 3.
[25] Regis, *A Natural History*, 33.

For Najwa, Tamer embodies a connection with the Divine that she has never experienced with anyone else. While the rest of his family is Muslim by culture and association, Tamer's values and commitments are such that he, through Islam, strives for the perfect balance of self and society, peace and justice, reading widely to deepen his knowledge of Islam. In its presentation of Tamer, the novel makes it clear that he has no interest in Islam used as a political ideology against perceived enemies. Tamer's Islam is a personal quest for self-realisation through religion. Unlike his mother and sister, Tamer follows the Islamic dietary code. Drinking and drugging are not part of his youth culture, and he is found in the mosque rather than in the club. There is an implied comparison between Tamer and Omar, Najwa's twin, which allows Tamer's virtues to be set in relief. Najwa's and Tamer's common self-actualisation-objective is their actualisation through God and a community of faith, whose earthly, practical embodiment is represented by the Hajj. Najwa states: "More than anything else…I would like to go on Hajj. If my Hajj is accepted, I will come back without any sins and start my life again, fresh."[26] Tamer responds as a child who does not carry the burden of sin as Najwa does: "I want to ride a camel from Medina to Mecca like the Prophet, peace be upon him, did."[27]

Perhaps the passage in the novel which most suggestively captures the attraction of Najwa and Tamer is one from early on in their relationship, before their feelings become apparent to each other: "Sometimes we meet on the landing, our reflections in the mirror making it seem as if there are four of us. The mirror in the landing is compassionate: it makes me look young, makes me look better than I feel though I always feel uplifted when I see him. It is natural; a beautiful, devout youth with striking eyes."[28]

The narrative strategically makes use of a secondary hero or anti-hero in order to clarify the spiritual connection of Najwa with Tamer, which in the final analysis, motivates her negotiation of the obstruction represented by the mother. There is a mutual attraction between Najwa and Anwar which goes back to their days at college in Khartoum. Anwar, an active member of the political left, is involved in the attempts to overthrow the corrupt Sudanese dictatorship, a regime in which Najwa's father is a

[26] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 209.
[27] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 209.
[28] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 100.

minister. Anwar's is a conflicted physical attraction to Najwa since he despises what her wealthy, aristocratic family represents. He also thinks that religion is the retrogressive sop of backward people, which would forever mire the country in problems.

After the left seizes power and Najwa's father is executed, Anwar makes no effort to enquire after Najwa who is in exile in London. He does make contact with her, however, when he also is exiled in London in 1989, after the government with which Anwar had found favour, is overthrown in a military coup. In London, Anwar is an asylum seeker, living in impoverished insecurity, hoping for a job as a newspaper reporter. He draws Najwa into his circle since he needs someone to help him translate his articles into idiomatic English, hypocritically taking advantage of the benefits of Najwa's private-school education, which he had always condemned. He also does not hesitate to accept Najwa's gifts of clothes and money to pay for his PhD. Anwar is unpredictable, vacillating between declarations of love and sneering abuse. He seduces Najwa at the same time, as he quietly maintains ties with a cousin whom his family has arranged for him to marry. Najwa links her physical relationship with Anwar to her final "coming down in the world," in the same way that drugs and imprisonment were her brother's coming down.[29] The contrast in the primary and secondary romantic relationships is stark. Anwar's commitment to the "religion" of Marxism does not prevent him from using Najwa, while Tamer's commitment to Islam places her out of exploitative bounds.

Regis describes the declaration as the "scene or scenes in which the hero declares his love for the heroine and the heroine her love for the hero."[30] In *Minaret*, the declaration is not so much a declaration of love, but instead a declaration that the suppressed attraction of the heroine and hero cannot continue without their religious integrity being retained. When they are seen together by Najwa's friend, Shahinaz, Tamer says to Najwa that "[i]t's not very Islamic for a man and woman to be friends…I heard a sheikh once say that it's like putting gunpowder and fire next to each other. [He then] blurts out, 'we should get married.'"[31] Najwa makes light of the situation, but it is apparent that their relationship is headed for a make-or-break climax. This climax takes the

29 Aboulela, *Minaret*, 100.
30 Regis, *A Natural History*, 34.
31 Aboulela, *Minaret*, 211.

form of the point of ritual death, which "marks the moment in the narrative when the union between heroine and hero, the hoped-for resolution, seems absolutely impossible, when it seems that the barrier will remain more substantial than ever."[32]

In *Minaret*, the barrier represented by the dissenting mother, the point of ritual death, is not brought down by the element of recognition – "new information" that will allow the barrier to be "overcome."[33] The moment of ritual death is thus "translated" into the social death of the heroine which sees her psychically trapped and consumed by guilt. *Minaret* thus underscores the significance of the obstacle, which is the crux of the romance narrative.

The Dissenting Mother as Obstruction in Islamic Romance

In Islamic romance, God is the ultimate factor in intimate relationships, becoming an obstacle where, in one way or another, the couple's desires do not conform with the Divine code. Divinities play a role in other religious traditions too, including African animisms, where gods and ancestors are significant actors in the personal lives of subjects. In the nascent scholarship of Islamic romance, Abdullah-Poulos' study of African-American romance fiction is illuminating. She proposes what she terms the "Stable Muslim Love Triangle" as the foundation of Muslim romance. This includes the heroine and hero, but also "the deity, Allah, at the apex as *mediator of desire*, driving the viability of love in plots."[34] Abdullah-Poulos contrasts African-American Muslim romance with Christian romance. Studies of Christian romance position God as "a victorious competitor – either through pain/death or enlightenment – for love between human subjects. By contrast, in African-American romances, "the immediate superior status of the deity in the love triangle [is realised with one] or both human subjects pursu[ing] His affection and approval to the point of deferring to His protocols when determining the suitability of the object of desire."[35]

Minaret suggests further that in Muslim romance narratives, the figure of the mother may be more significant than it is in other cultural and reli-

[32] Regis, *A Natural History*, 35.
[33] Regis, *A Natural History*, 36.
[34] Abdullah-Poulos, "The Stable Muslim Love Triangle," 1 (original emphasis).
[35] Abdullah-Poulos, "The Stable Muslim Love Triangle," 8.

gious traditions, precisely because of the status uniquely accorded the mother in Islam. Adapting Abdullah-Poulos' concept of the love triangle with God at the apex, Muslim romances may more broadly be found to incorporate the mother at an apex below the ultimate apex in God – a status endorsed and guaranteed by God. Ghadir Zannoun alerts us to Aboulela's focus on the mother in the first novel, *The Translator*. Prior to her relationship with Rae, the heroine, Sammar had been married to her cousin, as traditionally is common in Arab and other Muslim cultures. Zannoun brings into relief Sammar's affection for her aunt Mahasen, her husband Tareg's mother, which supersedes Sammar's feelings for her husband himself – "I love your mother more than you" – she says playfully, it would appear, to Tareg, but her words carry a deeper meaning.[36] The figure of the mother is explored with more complexity in Aboulela's next novel, *Minaret*, the novel considered in this essay.

One needs to bear in mind the status of the mother in Islam, which underpins the ethos of *Minaret*. Although Islam encourages respect for both mother and father, a special relationship of love and duty is forged with the mother. Both the Qur'an and the hadith, or narrations of the Prophet (*pbuh*), enjoin gratitude to one's parents, but single out the relationship with the mother as unique. The hadith which suggests that paradise lies at the feet of the mother is very well known. Perhaps less well known is the occasion where the Prophet is asked about the order in which one owes love and respect: The Prophet replied three times that love and respect are owed to the mother, and only the fourth time does he mention the father. This clearly is the ethical framework within which *Minaret* operates, even though in practice, many Islamic cultures may disregard the status and privilege owed to the woman as mother.

When Tamer complains to Najwa about being forced to study Business rather than Islamic History, Najwa appeases him by suggesting that she is sure "Allah will reward [him] for trying to please [his] parents."[37] Apart from a brief reference to Najwa's father in the novel, it is mothers who emerge as fully rounded characters, whose unique bond with children is emphasised, as is the child's desire and duty to please the mother. Both Najwa's and Omar's relationship with their mother, both in Khartoum and in London is mapped in detail, as is Tamer's relationship with his mother,

[36] *The Translator* 10, quoted in Ghadir K. Zannoun, "Home as Love: Transcending Positionality in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*," *Humanities* 8, no.72 (2019), 7.

[37] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 101.

Doctora Zeinab. Significant attention is also given to Najwa's friend, Shahinaz. Through the physicality and daily demands of Shahinaz's mothering of her baby boy, the magnitude of the demands of motherhood are highlighted. The relationship of romantic love between Najwa and Tamer is therefore set against a wide matrix of examples of maternal love, modulating erotic attachments.

Love for the mother also creates fear of the curse of the mother, and in Islam, as in African traditional and other religions, the curse is as real as the threat of physical violence or aggression. As a teenager in Khartoum, Najwa's mother warns her against the relationship with Anwar, heedful of the Islamic concept of *kafā'ah* which encourages a rough equivalence of the couple in marriage. In London, Najwa interprets the sordidness of her affair with Anwar as admonishment for not heeding her mother's advice.[38] Similarly, Najwa sees her brother, Omar as almost beyond redemption for his abuse of their mother in his drug-crazed condition, resulting in her cursing him never to be successful, never to be happy.

Najwa says to her brother in prison: "You are here because you broke Mama's heart. A son shouldn't hurt his mother. She cursed you with bad luck and Allah listens to a mother's prayer."[39] Najwa's actions at the end of the novel are motivated by her "motherly" apprehension that Tamer will be cursed by his mother's disappointment at marrying her. Najwa's "mothering" of Tamer is evident throughout the text. Like a mother, Najwa also fantasises about young women who may make more suitable wives for Tamer than herself. Thus, it is both as mother and lover that Najwa feels Doctora Zeinab's anguish, which also motivates her fear for the consequences of Tamer's disobeying his mother. Even though Najwa thinks Doctora Zeinab has a "practical" rather than "metaphysical" goodness that closes her to Tamer's spirituality, she nonetheless fears the maternal curse: "He is better than her and she will not acknowledge it. I see this clearly now. She is an obstacle to his spiritual growth or, more precisely, her disapproval is. She is a test for him and he will have

[38] Doctora Zeinab implicitly applies the same principle of *kafā'ah* to Najwa's possible marriage to her son, in terms of which the marriage may be strained because of the age difference and the unlikelihood that they might have children. Tamer highlights that the Prophet's first wife was fifteen years his senior, but in the novelistic relationship, as more generally in Islamic communities this dimension of the prophetic life does not encourage marriage to a more mature wife.

[39] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 196.

to pass. I will not let him fail. I will not let her curse him, not like my mother cursed Omar."[40]
Thus, even though Najwa smells paradise on Tamer, a paradise in which she could share, she gives him up. As she allows Tamer to find heaven at the feet of his mother, she lays her heart at the mother's feet.

These complex ethical negotiations involving the mother, are replicated on a material plane by considerations of money that again bring Najwa spiritually down at the end of the narrative. The discovery of the love affair results in Najwa losing her job, and Tamer moving out of the apartment to squat in the mosque. A series of strategic meetings take place between the lover-mother Najwa, and Tamer, and also between Najwa and Tamer's mother, Doctora Zeinab. At the heart of these meetings and negotiations is Tamer's wellbeing. Doctora Zeinab is desperate to remove Najwa as a potential emotional timebomb in her son's life. She comes to Najwa's apartment to pay her the month's salary that Lamya omitted to give her, following Lamya's horror when she discovers their relationship. Doctora Zeinab also gives her a large sum of money as "compensation" for the humiliating way in which she was treated by Lamya.

Najwa accepts what could be seen as a bribe in exchange for a pledge to withdraw from Tamer's life. It strikes Najwa, when she is depositing the cheque, that the "bribe" is for exactly the same amount she had loaned Anwar to pay for his PhD. He never pays her back. She understands her loss to be the penalty which she had to pay to extricate herself from the sleaziness of that relationship. She consoles herself that in being given the money by Tamer's mother, she is now being paid back. The spiritual upliftment that the reader witnesses in Najwa throughout the novel, is lowered by the overt grubbiness of money at the end. It also strikes the reader that Najwa has allowed herself to be paid twice for her last month of work. At one of their final meetings, Najwa reminds Tamer that she has not been paid. Perhaps she does this to belittle herself so that it is not hard for Tamer to leave her. Tamer pays her from the pocket money he gets from his mother. However, the novel opens Najwa's motivations to scrutiny since she does not return the money when Doctora Zeinab pays her the wages for a second time. In other

[40] Aboulela, *Minaret*, 264.

words, Najwa knowingly "double-dips," dropping her standing in the ethical and spiritual scales.

The closure is even more ambiguous and open-ended, since Najwa decides to use the "bribe" money to go for her Hajj, clutching desperately at a last emotional and spiritual upliftment. As in other Aboulela novels, where dream sequences convey the deepest meanings of the narrative, *Minaret* ends with Najwa's feverish dream. She dreams that her friend, Shahinaz comes to her, saying, "You took the money, so it can't have been love."[41] The dream then projects back in time to when Najwa was a child in her parents' home, but the home now is a prison with "the ceiling…caved in, the floor…gutted and the crumbling walls…smeared with guilt."[42] Najwa therefore finds herself caught in the same emotional and spiritual constraint as at the start of the novel: "I've come down in the world. I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and where there isn't much room to move."[43]

Conclusion

We need to return to the concept of the obstruction which gives the romance its narrative drive: So significant is the obstruction, that its removal signals the end of the love story. Pamela Regis' morphology of the romance plot defines the obstacle or barrier as the "reasons that this heroine and hero cannot marry. [She also adds that] the romance novel's conflict often consists entirely of this barrier between the heroine and hero."[44] In *Minaret*, the barrier presented by the dissenting mother cannot be removed, and the complexity of the ending is overdetermined by the lover who is also a social "mother." This lover-mother, furthermore, is cognisant of the unique status of the mother in Islam.

Usually in a romance novel, when the obstruction is removed, the lovers are able to achieve union. This constitutes the happy ending. The tragic ending in death is the ultimate obstruction which, paradoxically, also allows the supreme joining, namely, the metaphysical union. The ending of *Minaret* is unhappy but not tragic, since the lovers are forever parted, without the consolation of the paradoxical union in death. The parting, furthermore, is unequal. The narrative suggests that the youthful Tamer

41 Aboulela, *Minaret*, 275.
42 Aboulela, *Minaret*, 276.
43 Aboulela, *Minaret*, 1.
44 Regis, *A Natural History*, 32.

will bounce back quite easily. The closure of *Minaret* could have brought it closer to a happy ending by giving Najwa the self-gratification of being able to take the moral high road. She could have separated from Tamer, in this way protecting his faith and spirituality, embodied here in the necessity of the approval of the mother. However, for the ending to be happier, Najwa also needed to turn down the "bribe," which she uses to finance her Hajj. *Minaret* thus significantly opens up the end of the romance to ambiguity and uncertainty since, not only are the lovers parted, but Najwa's spiritual upliftment, visible throughout the narrative, is suddenly and unexpectedly collapsed through the inexplicable seediness of her final actions, which her Hajj may, or may not, redeem. Crucial to the complexity of this ending is the figure of the mother, whose significance in Muslim romance, Aboulela very powerfully underscores.

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Negotiating Gendered Leadership Positions within African Initiated Christian Churches in Amsterdam

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ABSTRACT
Our research contributes to the discussion of feminist theorists on how the dominance of women in religious communities is not reflected in leadership positions of women. With the case of African Initiated Christian Churches (AICCs) in Amsterdam, this study investigates the intersection of gender, citizenship, and religion. The concept of religious citizenship provides the analytical tool to examine women-men relationships within immigrant religious communities. The research focuses on gendered leadership within the AICCs in Amsterdam, to enquire into how women exercise leadership in spite of the challenges faced in the AICCs. Data are drawn from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and informal interviews in Amsterdam. This study concludes that women's access to hierarchical positions is nuanced, as mainline Protestant churches are more flexible compared to Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. We argue that some women are situated in *de facto* second-class religious citizenship positions in religious communities which undermine women's search for equal opportunities as religious citizens. Some women, however, exercise agency to circumvent the structural constraints.

KEYWORDS
gender; religious citizenship; African Initiated Christian Churches; agency; women leadership; Ghanaian immigrants

Introduction

Feminist theorists have established that the dominant societal order is not gender neutral, but rather a masculine ethos that structurally favours men.[1] In recent years, feminists have been agitating for equal rights with an inclusion and opportunities for women in the nation-state[2] because women have not always been admitted as fully-fledged citizens within political communities. Feminist theorists are engendering citizenship, as membership in communities are not limited to the nation-state at the macro level,[3] but includes membership also at the meso level[4] – at both

1 Baukje Prins, "Mothers and Muslima's, Sisters and Sojourners: The Contested Boundaries of Feminist Citizenship," in *Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies*, eds. Kathy Davis, Mary Evans, and Judith Lorber (London, Sage, 2006), 237.

2 Kathy Davis, Mary Evans, and Judith Lorber (eds.), *Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies* (London: Sage, 2006).

3 Ruth Lister, "Citizenship and Gender," in Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology, eds. Kate Nash and Alan Scott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 323.

religious and ethnic communities. This research focuses on how belonging and leadership positions in the religious community of African Initiated Christian Churches (AICCs) are gendered.

Women's quests for liberation have revealed that religion is one of the core institutions that denigrate and marginalise women from the exercise of power and autonomy.[5] Interestingly, Oduyoye notes that "God is male does not make the male God."[6] African women theologians have argued that they do want to be active participants in the religious field as healers rather than simply being healed."[7] The study aims at contributing to the discussion on how gender matters and shapes the pattern of the social life of women in the AICCs in Amsterdam. Arguably, the study of gendered citizenship in the AICCs creates an awareness that may generate radical transformation in the *status quo*. Studies have examined the oppression of women in AICCs which centred mainly on the differentiation in the treatment of women and men in addressing pregnancy out of wedlock, sexuality education, and gendered sanctions of second-generation migrants in AICCs.[8] Ndeda[9] also discusses the gender dynamics in leadership roles in an African Independent Church. In the study of women pastors in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Adasi and Frempong[10] have discovered socio-cultural setbacks in their line of duty. Although Adams[11] and Soothill[12] have identified, to some extent, the

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4 Evangelia Tastsoglou and Alexandra Dobrowolsky (eds.), *Women, Migration, and Citizenship: Making Local, National, and Transnational Connections*, Vol. 8 (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing. 2006), 10.

5 Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Gender and Theology in Africa Today* (Accra: Institute of Women in Religion & Culture Accra, Ghana, 2006), 4

6 Oduyoye, *Gender and Theology in Africa Today*, 5.

7 Mercy A. Oduyoye, Women and Ritual in Africa, in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, edited by Mercy A. Oduyoye and Kanyoro R.A. Musimbi (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 17-8.

8 Justice R.K.O. Kyei and Rafal Smocynski, "Religious citizenship and gendered sanctions in the lived experience of second generation Ghanaians," *Social Compass* 66, no.4 (2019): 502-21.

9 Milfred A.J. Ndeda, "The Nomiya Luo Church: A gender analysis of the dynamics of an African Independent Church among the Luo of Siaya District," in *Gender, Literature and Religion in Africa*, edited by Elizabeth le Roux, Mildred A.J. Ndeda, George Nyamndi, F.E.M.K. Senkoro, and Isaac Ssetuba (Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2005), 49-78.

10 Grace S. Adasi and Dorothy A. Frempong, "Multiple roles of African women leaders and their challenges: The case of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 4, no.11 (2014), 63-8.

11 Carole E, Adams, *Women Clerks in Wilhelmine Germany: Issues of class and gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

leadership roles of women in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, they conclude with caveats of their generalisation. Kapinde and Higgs also discuss how women ordination in the Anglican Church in Kenya took shape and the obstacles which they encountered in the process.[13]

The uniqueness of this article dwells in how it intersects gender, citizenship, and religion in understanding an equal access to hierarchical positions among immigrant religious institutions. We provide empirical evidence to demonstrate how the gendering of the concept of citizenship facilitates the discussion of the inconsistencies within the AICCs in addressing gendered aspects of leadership. The study enquires how leadership positions within the AICCs in Amsterdam are gendered, and examines how women exercise leadership in spite of the social challenges faced in AICCs. The article proceeds with the conceptualisation of gender, religious citizenship, and agency. It further briefly describes the emergence of AICCs in the Netherlands and Ghanaian population in the Netherlands, as most of the members of the AICCs studied, are Ghanaians. The study then presents the data and methods of the research and continues to elaborate on the findings and discussions. It ends with the conclusions.

Conceptualising Gender, Religious Citizenship, and Agency

In this work, gender is considered as a theoretical tool that guides the understanding of the categories of women or men in social interaction, not limited to the individual, but inclusive of social institutions like education, religion, and family[14] which are also gendered. The gender category is enacted in multi-layered forms in social life that gives meaning to and shapes the pattern of social relations. Gender is both static and variable, inasmuch as it is produced and reproduced. The sociology of gender has identified social relations of domination of masculinity over femininity, which is culturally exalted.[15] Gender is a system

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12 Jane Soothill, "Gender and Pentecostalism in Africa," in *Pentecostalism in Africa*, eds. Andrew Davies and William Kay (Brill: London, 2015), 191-219.

13 Stephen A. Kapinde and Eleanor T. Higgs, "Global Anglican Discourse and Women's Ordination in Kenya: The Controversy in Kirinyaga, 1979-1992, and its Legacy," *Journal of Anglican Studies* (2021): 1-18.

14 Ronald Jepperson, "Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism," in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, eds. Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 145.

15 Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 22.

of social practices that constitutes people as different and that organises relations of inequality.[16] Gender is conceptualised here as the "patriarchal phenomenon that structures relationships in hierarchies and pyramids."[17] Oduyoye holds that gender is not limited to biological sex as it embraces power relations between men and women.

In order to facilitate the gender discussion on participation and representation in AICCs, the study employs the concept of citizenship from a feminist perspective. Traditionally the notion of citizenship has been limited to the legal political rights within the public sphere of the nation-state.[18] Marshall defines citizenship as "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed."[19] Feminist theorists have, however, argued that the plurality of communities and the varied forms of belonging result in multiple meanings and practices of membership which are not embraced in the traditional nation-state association with citizenship.[20] Citizenship should therefore not be perceived as a static attribute of a group of people within a given polity. Citizenship is rather contested, fluid, and dynamic, and it involves processes of negotiation and struggle. Citizenship is therefore extended to membership at the meso and micro levels. We conceptualise citizenship not exclusively as membership in a state, but as membership in a community with the rights to participation and representation.

Drawing from the work of Kyei and Smoczynski,[21] we define religious citizenship as the process of exercising equal rights to participation, representation, and identity formation by members within a religious community. Participation is conceptualised as the right to equal access by both women and men in a given religious community to partake in all forms of its activities. The rite of initiation, such as baptism, provides full

16 S. Army Wharton, *The Sociology of Gender: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 31.

17 Oduyoye, *Gender and Theology in Africa Today*, 3.

18 Bryan S. Turner, "Outline of a theory of citizenship," *Sociology* 24, no.2 (1990): 189-217.

19 Thomas H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 28-9; Barbara Hobson and Ruth Lister, "Citizenship," in *Contested Concepts in Gender and Social Politics*, eds. Barbara Hobson, Jane Lewis, and Birte Siim (Aldershut: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002), 23-53.

20 Ruth Lister, "Citizenship: Towards a feminist synthesis," *Feminist Review* 57, no.1 (1997): 28-48.

21 Kyei and Smocynski, "Religious citizenship and gendered sanctions," 508.

access to membership in a religious community. The indicators of participation are the right to vote and to access religious activities. Representation is referred to as equal rights for women and men to be elected or nominated to formal leadership positions within a religious community. The indicators of representation are nomination or election into a leadership position. The formally nominated positions in AICCs are deaconesses or deacons, elders, presiding elders, care-takers, catechists, pastors, and apostles. Women and men compete for representation within the religious field as they have the ambition to achieve full religious citizenship. The dominance of men in religious positions has embedded the competition in the religious field with a male hegemony.

In addressing the gender relations in AICCs, some women do exercise agency, trying to assume leadership positions. We argue that social actors are not completely autonomous in their engagement as they are entangled with social structures. Agency is not always explicitly contesting social structures. It rather plays according to the rules of the game to achieve the desired leadership positions, even if informally. Aymer notes how Nigerian women missionaries established para-church organisations that entrusted leadership positions to women without threatening the male hegemony in the religious field.[22] Women exercise agency, but they do so within the confines of the dominant culture of the religious community. Agency for women in religious communities is about being "conscious actors, not passive subjects in the various situations in which they find themselves."[23] Women position themselves as social actors with self-recognition that translates into social acknowledgement.[24] Agency is thus the ability to take action in situations in which one is entangled with social structures, and that action transforms social relations in one way or the other.[25]

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22 Paula Aymer, "West African and Caribbean women evangelists," in *Spirit on the Move: Black Women and Pentecostalism in Africa and the Diaspora*, eds. Judith Casselberry and Elizabeth A. Pritchard (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 110.

23 Helen Ralston, "Citizenship, identity, agency and resistance among Canadian and Australian women of South Asia," in *Women, Migration and Citizenship: Making Local, National and Transnational Connections*, eds. Evangelia Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2006), 184.

24 Charles Taylor, "The politics of recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 27.

25 William H. Jr. Sewell, "A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no.1 (1992): 20.

Emergence of AICCs in the Netherlands

When African immigrants arrived in the Netherlands in masses during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Catholic Church and other mainline Protestant missionary churches in the country did not immediately reach out to the pastoral needs of the immigrants.[26] However, the Pentecostal/ Charismatic churches quickly started to establish their branches here and simultaneously some immigrants established new churches[27] to deal with the trauma and challenges of the new environment. Most of the African-led churches that were established during the 1990s, were initiated by Ghanaians.[28] There were initially 17 AICCs, and by 1997, the number had already risen to 40 in Amsterdam alone. AICCs in Amsterdam had grown to about 150 in 2013.[29] The presence of immigrant Christian churches in the host country provided an avenue for new arrivals to meet people with similar languages and worldviews. AICCs in Amsterdam provided the opportunity for some first-generation African migrants to meet and share their experiences, with the aim of helping to shed the stress and trauma that their migration trajectories might have generated. Some AICCs in Amsterdam therefore tried to provide psychosocial wellbeing services to the first-generation African immigrants.

In this research, "AICC" is defined as any Christian denomination that was initiated or newly formed in or transplanted in the host country by immigrants of African descent. The research identified two main types of AICCs in Amsterdam. Similar divisions are also noted in the study of African Christian churches in Canada.[30] The first group consisted of traditional missionary churches like the Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. The second category consisted of those churches that were Pentecostal/Charismatic in nature and were initiated by Africans rather than foreign missionaries.[31]

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26 Chandersen E.S. Choenni, *Ghanazen in Nederland. Een Profiel* (Den Haag: Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijkszaken, 2002), 24

27 Gerrie Ter Haar. "Strangers in the Promised Land: African Christians in Europe," *Exchange* 24, no.1 (1995): 15.

28 Ter Haar, "Strangers in the Promised Land."

29 Dick van den Bos, "Kerken in de Bijlmer zijn parels in Amsterdam-Zuidoost," *Reformatorish Dagblad*, 27 June 2013.

30 Joseph Mensah, "'Doing religion' overseas: The characteristics and functions of Ghanaian immigrant Churches in Toronto, Canada," *Societies Without Borders* 4 (2009): 21-44.

31 Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, "Mediating spiritual power: African Christianity, transnationalism and the media," in *Religion crossing boundaries: Transnational religious*

Ghanaians in the Netherlands

Mass immigration of Ghanaians to the Netherlands is a relatively new phenomenon compared to the massive number of Turkish, Moroccans, Antilleans, and Surinamese immigrants who entered the country from the late 1960s onwards. However, the number of Ghanaians has grown steadily in the last three decades.[32] According to the Amsterdam Bureau for Research and Statistics, Ghanaians in the Netherlands numbered about 12,480 in 1996, while in 2014, the total Ghanaian population had increased to 24,460[33] out of which 10,120 belonged to the category of second generation. More than half of the Ghanaians live in Amsterdam, being the fifth largest immigrant group in this city after the Moroccans, Turkish, Antilleans, and Surinamese.[34]

Most Ghanaian immigrants settled in the Bijlmer district of Amsterdam and, to a lesser extent, in The Hague.[35] Ghanaians in Amsterdam became well known in the Netherlands after a plane crashed into buildings in the southeast of Amsterdam in September 1992, claiming many Ghanaian lives and injuring others.[36] Ghanaians in the Netherlands are from different ethnic groups in Ghana, but most of them are Akan, consisting of the Asante, Kwahu, and the Fante. Ghanaians are visible in the Netherlands through their churches, shops (food, clothing), media (television and radio broadcasting), and magazines.[37] In spite of the medium education level of Ghanaians in the Netherlands, they are employed in jobs that require specific skills which are usually undervalued and feminised. The workers in these jobs are underpaid and stigmatised, mainly due to low proficiency in the Dutch language and

and social dynamics in Africa and the new African Diaspora, eds. Afe Adogame and James V. Spickard (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 87-103.

32 Statistics Netherlands, "Population: Sex, age, migration background and generation," 1 January 2019, https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/en/dataset/37325eng/table.

33 Statistics Netherlands, "Population."

34 Gemeente Amsterdam, Amsterdam in Cifers 2013. Gemeente Amsterdam, Amsterdam: O+S Research, http://www.ois.amsterdam.nl/media/Amsterdam%20in%20cijfers%202013/HTML/#/62/.

35 Gerrie ter Haar, "The African Diaspora in the Netherlands," in *New Trends and Developments in African Religions*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 248.

36 Jeroen W. Knipscheer, Eleonore de Jong, Rolf Kleber, and Ekow Lamptey, "Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands: General health, acculturative stress and utilization of mental health care," *Journal of Community Psychology* 28, no.4 (2000): 461.

37 Choenni, *Ghanazen in Nederland*, 24.

discrimination in the Dutch labour market,[38] as well as the cumbersome process of foreign diplomatic recognition by the Dutch government.

Data and Method

The data for this research are drawn from a research project that was conducted in Amsterdam between January 2014 and January 2015. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Follow-up interviews were made in December 2017. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and informal interviews. Life history interviews were conducted with 50 AICC members in Amsterdam, out of which 35 were women and 15 were men, being representatives of nine AICCs in Amsterdam. The study built two typologies of AICCs based on doctrinal teachings and lived experiences, namely Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and mainline Protestant churches. Four of the AICCs were classified as mainline Protestant churches and five were identified as Pentecostal/Charismatic churches.

Findings and Discussions

Gendering Demographic Characteristics of AICCs

The nine AICCs in Amsterdam that participated in the research are located in the municipality of Amsterdam Southeast. Most of the members in AICCs are of Ghanaian origin. All the churches have their weekly service on Sundays, except the Seventh Day Adventist Church that meets on Saturdays. Apart from the general weekly meetings, there are sub-groups that meet during the week. The main sub-groups are women societies, men societies, youth groups, ushers, and evangelisation ministries.

Membership in the AICCs varied between 100 and 500, 40% of which were men, and women 60% as shown in table 1 below. Five of the AICCs identified themselves as Pentecostal/Charismatic while four classified themselves as mainline Protestants. Only two of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches had their mother churches back home while they existed as branches in the Netherlands. The other three

[38] Justice, R.K.O. Kyei, Rafal Smoczynski, and Mary B. Setrana, "Evidence of Spiritual Capital in the Schooling of Second-Generation Ghanaians in Amsterdam," *African Human Mobility Review* 7, no.1 (2021), 90.

Pentecostal/Charismatic churches were formed in the Netherlands and two had extended their branches to Ghana.

Table 1: AICCs in Amsterdam interviewed

Name of Church	Date of Establishment	Population: Men, Women	Denomination
Church of Pentecost	1990	250, 450	Pentecostal
Redemption Faith International Ministries	1995	110, 200	Charismatic
Christ the King Baptist Church	1992	56, 100	Mainline Protestant
Resurrection Power and Living Bread Ministries	1990	125, 275	Pentecostal
Amsterdam Seventh Day Adventist Church	1995	100, 160	Protestant
Emmanuel Presbyterian Church of Ghana	2000	105, 150	Mainline Protestant
Wesley Methodist Church of Ghana	1997	150, 250	Mainline Protestant
Love Christian Centre	1997	80, 50	Pentecostal/ Charismatic
Pentecost Revival Church International	2000	60, 100	Charismatic

All the representatives of the studied AICCs emphasised that about 60% of their members were women while the remaining were men as shown in table 1 above. The ratio has been more or less the same since the inception of the studied AICCs in Amsterdam. Study after study has found that women are over-represented in churches.[39] In spite of the high rate of women's presence and participation, they do not form part of the highest governing body in the hierarchical structure of these AICCs. A representative of the Redemption Faith International (RFI) narrated, "There is a three-tier hierarchical structure of the church. As at now, we do not have women in the ministerial council, but there are women in the

[39] Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Introducing African women's theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 10.

deaconry. This is purely because of competence but not biblical as the church does not have any laws that discriminate against women."[40]

Androcentric hegemonic power relations are hidden in the constitution and daily practices in the exercise of religious citizenship of women and men in the religious field. Ostensibly, the constitution of most of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches appears to be gender-neutral, but the common practice discriminates against women's representation, and consequently women's rights to leadership as religious citizens. The research discovered that competence does not explain the gender insensitivity and imbalance against women in most of the AICCs as members in the ministerial council were founding members. The puzzle persists: Why were none of the women founding members part of the ministerial council, whether to represent women's grievances and/or competences? The granting of the right of representation to women in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches even at the secondary level permits women's voices to be heard due to the gender-differentiated nature of citizenship[41] as are witnessed under the subsection on agency below.

Gendered Participation and Representation

As the nation-state sets conditions for admission to citizenship,[42] in much the same way, religious fields have criteria for acceptance into religious citizenship. Religious citizenship is a status that individuals have to qualify for to gain entrance. With the rite of baptism, women and men are incorporated into the religious field as religious citizens. In principle, both have the right and entitlement to participation and representation with no gender obstacles. The head pastor of the RFI related that "the church is open to all and sundry and it is mandatory that all members confirm their belongingness to the church through baptism."[43] However, data from the participant observation and informal interviews indicate that sitting arrangements in some of the AICCs were gendered, as women and men had designated or culturally accepted seating places. In most of the studied AICCs, women and men did not mingle with each other during

[40] Interview: Representative of the RFI, 5 November 2015.

[41] Kathleen B. Jones, "Citizenship in a Woman-Friendly Polity," *Signs* 15, no.4 (1990): 782.

[42] Herman van Gunsteren, "Four Conceptions of Citizenship," in *The Condition of Citizenship*, ed. Bart van Steenbergen (London: Sage, 1994), 37.

[43] Interview: Head pastor of the RFI, 16 January 2015.

church services and in some church-related activities.[44] Moreover, women were not supposed to sit on the altar or platform during church services, as it is only preserved for the men in the presbytery.[45]

The Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in this research adopted a more rigid approach to women representation compared to the mainline Protestant churches. Data from the fieldwork show that there were gender variations in the exercise of power and authority in the two typologies of the AICCs. The head pastor of the Church of Pentecost recounted, "Actually anyone can be a member of the church without discriminating against sex, race, or colour. A person is considered a full member of the church when he or she is baptised. To become an executive member of the church, one has to be part of the presbytery. The presbytery consists of deacons/deaconesses, elders, pastors, evangelists, prophets, and apostles in ascending order. The highest position within the presbytery that females can attain is deaconess. A woman cannot be ordained as a pastor. Anyway, the pastor's wife is called *ɔsɔfo* Maame[46] (*Pastor Mother*) although she is not a pastor. It is part of the church's teaching and the situation may change in the future, but for now women cannot rise beyond deaconship."[47]

The head pastor of the Pentecost Revival church also stated: "The church is Bible believing, so anyone who wants to know Christ can be part of us irrespective of race or gender. Baptism is the rite of initiation into the church. The presbytery consists of deacons and deaconesses, elders, overseer, and pastors. There are females in the church who are deaconesses, but the church does not call females to eldership, which is the next stage after deaconship, neither can women become pastors. However, the wife of the pastor is *ɔsɔfo* Maame. She has her role to play

[44] Gender relations in contemporary Christian organisations not only include issues of leadership but also the division of lay labour during the weekly routine of church life. Women polish the brass, clean the linens, and fill the pews. Men, by contrast, have to contribute to church policy decisions, count the money, and fill the platform (Nancy Nason-Clark, "Gender Relations in Contemporary Christian Organizations," in *The Sociology of Religion: A Canadian Focus*, ed. Warren E. Hewitt [Toronto: Butterworths, 1993], 210).

[45] Justice R.K.O. Kyei, Elizabeth N.M.K. Yalley, and Emmanuel K.E. Antwi, "Field Notes," 2014.

[46] The original term is *Asafo Maame* (*Church Mother*), but all the church representatives who were interviewed, referred to it as *ɔsɔfo Maame* (*Pastor Mother*).

[47] Interview: Head pastor of the Church of Pentecost, 23 October 2014.

in the church by ensuring that women live in harmony with their families at home.[48]

Women within most of the studied Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are constrained from climbing the leadership ladder and fully exploring their potentials and capabilities as religious citizens due to the "masculinized ethos" that dominate church legislations and culture.[49] The religious field of the AICCs in Amsterdam is not a level playing ground whereby women and men have equal access to leadership positions. The social relationships are rather embedded in a male hegemony. Women can rise up to deaconship positions, being the least in the hierarchy of the presbytery. Citizenship is a universal yardstick against which progress can be measured, while the underlying principle of citizenship is inclusion.[50] There are, however, androcentric tendencies in some Pentecostal/Charismatic churches that exclude female congregants from having equal rights to representation.

The honorary title of *ɔsɔfo* Maame bears no ecclesial authority, but it is embedded with cultural meanings. The gender dichotomy locates the *ɔsɔfo* Maame figure as mother and caregiver in the private sphere to take care of the children in the church and get involved in educating women in the congregation on how to nurture and maintain happy family relations. Male congregants are rather engaged in decision-making and the execution of power in the public sphere of the AICCs. It is worth noting that, in contrast with this, Charismatic churches in Ghana have *ɔsɔfo* Maame considered as co-pastors to their husbands.[51] These findings reveal the nuances and contradictions in women leadership in Charismatic churches.

A representative of Love Christian Centre reiterated: "Any baptised member could be nominated as a deacon or deaconess or elder or pastor of the church. The church hierarchy consists of the ministerial council, which is composed of the senior pastor, the associate pastor, the elders, two people from the finance department, and also a board of

48 Interview: Head pastor of Pentecost Revival, 15 August 2014.
49 Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.
50 Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays*, 29.
51 Soothill, *Gender Social Change and Spiritual Power*, 29.

trustees. Besides that, we have the deaconry which consists of deacons and deaconesses and then we have the workers."[52]

From the data, our analysis is that women are considered as "second-class" citizens in this space.[53] Women's ability to represent is discounted because of stereotypes that are perpetuated by sexism, which associate power and leadership with men, while women are excluded from leadership roles. The understanding is that the result of spiritual and religious values, culturally grounded in Pentecostal/Charismatic teachings, are generating a biased power relation between women and men in the religious field. Social boundaries are constructed and sustained by a male hegemony that governs the exercise of equal rights by religious citizens in most AICCs. The social boundaries are laden with power relations and gender inequalities.[54] Some of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches echo their doctrinal teachings from subjective biblical interpretations that exclude women from the hierarchical structure.

The mainline Protestant churches have created spaces for women to be part of their leadership, however, with more constraints for women compared to men. A founding member of the Amsterdam branch of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana communicated the following: "The church has membership in Ghana and different parts of the world. Anyone can be admitted as a member of the church, but a person is fully recognised as a member of the church when he or she is in communion with the church through baptism and participate in the sharing of bread and wine in the church. The church does not place any gender limit to the attainment of leadership positions. The church has a lot of pastors who are women and some of them hold key positions. The caretaker of our branch is a woman, and we have a woman ordained minister in one of our branches here in Holland. The church executive council has equal representation of both men and women."[55]

A founding member of the Amsterdam branch of the Methodist Church of Ghana also stated: "The church does not discriminate against any group

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52 Interview: Representative of Love Christian Centre, 7 September 2014.

53 Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 69.

54 Paul Boyle, "Population Geography: Transnational Women on the Move," *Progress in Human Geography* 26, no.4 (2002): 537.

55 Interview: Founding member of the Amsterdam branch of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 25 September 2014.

of people, sex, or race from joining the church. Membership is obtained in the church through infant or adult baptism and partaking in the celebration of the Last Supper. Women are ordained as pastors in the Methodist church of Ghana without any hindrance to gender differences. Some of the ordained women ministers have risen to different leading positions in the church. The first secretary general of the Amsterdam branch was a woman. My wife was the circuit leader when she was in Ghana. Here in Holland, she led the newly formed Methodist Church of Ghana in The Hague."[56]

These mainline Protestant churches are regendering citizenship in the religious field by reviewing their constitution and daily practices towards the representation of both women and men in the churches' hierarchical structures. The regendering of citizenship empowers some women in the public sphere and corrects the gender imbalances in women's representation in the religious field of some of the studied AICCs.[57] Whereas most of the mainline Protestant churches in our study have taken up practical steps to bridge the gender gap in woman representation, almost all the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are entrenched in gender dichotomy that deter women from equal rights to representation in leadership. Data from the fieldwork further show that none of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and the mainline Protestant churches in this study has recruited a woman pastor to head their congregation.

Agency Mitigates Gendered Leadership Practices

In cognisance of the structural and institutional gendered constraints in the access to participation and representation in the religious field, some women in this research indicated that they "regendered citizenship." The process of regendering citizenship embraces individual members' rights to participation, which is translated in the exercise of personal agency by some of the respondents in the public sphere of the AICCs. Some of the women respondents acted and reacted to the gendered constraints posed by the church structures, which were imbued with some biblical teachings that hindered their attainment of some degree of religious citizenship. A participant narrated about the agency of women compared to men in the youth group of her church: "Women are more serious and active than men in the youth group. For example, if we organise youth

[56] Interview: Founding member of the Amsterdam branch of the Methodist Church of Ghana, 6 November 2014.

[57] Lister, *Citizenship*, 69.

programmes in the church and we ask people to spontaneously take up duties, the women are always proactive and respond positively, whereas the men are reluctant and are normally obliged before they get involved. The men always want to play the supporting role while the women assume the leading roles. We, the women in the youth group know what we want, and we work towards our goals without any intimidation. We believe in equal power relations between men and women as it is translated in our daily lives in the Dutch society."[58]

Another interviewee also narrated the exercise of agency in her church together with a friend: "A woman friend and I took up the initiative to mobilise the young girls and boys in the church. The aim was to engage them with Bible teachings and other practical daily tips, which they may be lacking in their participation in the main church service. We presented our proposal to the church council and it was approved and the project was successful. As we were brought up in the Netherlands, we have embraced the right to equal access to leadership and participation, which empowers us to live it out in the church."[59]

Agency as self-definition occurs within a social setting through the awareness of one's self and one's self-conception as socially founded.[60] In spite of the androcentric religious citizenship practices within the studied AICCs, some women do express leadership qualities and abilities in the day-to-day activities of their churches. Some of the women respondents created their own social space within the religious field where they exhibited leadership. Agency is a relational process[61] that enables women to resist the dominant androcentric norms that deter them from competing and engaging in the exercise of leadership in the religious field. Participatory citizenship or the practice of citizenship is in a constant process of mutation and negotiation. Representation is negotiated and redefined in the religious field of some AICCs in Amsterdam through lived experiences.

58 Interview: Participant 1 in church, 6 January 2015.
59 Interview: Participant 2 in church, 23 December 2017.
60 Kathryn Abrams, "From Autonomy to Agency: Feminist Perspectives on Self-Direction," *William & Mary Law Review* 40 (1999), 825.
61 Catharine Mackinnon, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 91-2.

Conclusions

Theoretically, this article has contributed to the advancement of the understanding in the contested concept of religious citizenship from a gendered perspective, as it demonstrates that citizenship is not applied only to the nation-state but also to meso level associations. Empirically, the study has shown the gendered nature of leadership within the religious field in the participation and representation of religious citizens in the AICCs in Amsterdam. The conceptualisation of religious citizenship permitted the discussion of the gendered distribution of rights of membership, opportunities, and leadership positions within the AICCs in Amsterdam. Religious citizenship has revealed the multi-layered and multiplicity of power relations that exist in these AICCs.

The study concludes that the practice of religious citizenship is gendered in complex and diverse ways. Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in this study are entrenched in the gender dichotomy as women congregants are deprived access to priesthood and some leadership positions, compared to mainline Protestant churches that allow women to compete for all hierarchical positions. When this finding is juxtaposed with the work of Soothill,[62] it reveals the nuances and contradictions in the lived experiences of woman leadership in Charismatic churches, in spite of the gendered challenges. The study found, however, that none of the mainline Protestant churches in this study has recruited women as head pastors.

The study also noted that some women are situated in *de facto* second-class citizenship positions in the religious field,[63] which undermines women's search for equal rights as religious citizens. The gendered nature of religious citizenship is not peculiar to the studied AICCs in Amsterdam, as it reflects similarly in Pentecostal churches in Ghana that subjectively interpret the Bible as legitimising gender discrimination, so as to perpetuate the marginalisation of women in official leadership positions. The reverse is, however, the case with mainline Protestant churches who are adopting an inclusive approach in the recruitment of leaders. Mainstreaming gender in AICCs require the transformation of

62 Soothill, *Gender Social Change and Spiritual Power*.

63 Kia L. Caldwell, Kathleen Coll, Tracy Fisher, Renya K. Ramirez, and Lok Siu, "Introduction Collectivity and Comparativity: A Feminist Approach to Citizenship," in *Gendered Citizenships*, eds. Kia L. Caldwell, Renya K. Ramirez, Kathleen Coll, Tracy Fisher, and Lok Siu (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

the patriarchal reading of the holy Scriptures that have become the yardstick for violating the humanity of women.[64]

True citizenship blossoms where there is sharing in solidarity.[65] The discussion demonstrated the persistence of women subordination in the religious field in spite of the numerical strength of women and their effective roles. The motherly qualities referred to as *ɔsɔfo Maame* or caregivers represent skills, values, and competence that need to be fused into the leadership of most of the studied AICCs to enhance their mission and goals. These skills are peculiar to women and make women representation unique and different from men's representation. The exclusion of women from the highest decision-making body of most AICCs in Amsterdam does not permit the taking of decisions that truly reflect the concerns of women in the religious field. The research revealed the hardships and daily struggles of women in AICCs, living at the intersection of African, woman, and Christian identities.

The research pointed out that the relation between the institutional position of participation and representation and the practice of religious citizenship are not straightforward, as some women navigate their ways around women subordination and androcentric practices. Women are not passive in their lived experience in the AICCs, as they contest, reinterpret, and position themselves as active actors. The self-recognition of the structural constraints of the AICCs empowers some women to negotiate leadership positions, even if informally.

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The Role of Religion in the Lives, Agency, and Activism of Domestic Worker Leaders

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[1]SHORT BIO
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ABSTRACT
One of the key themes that emerged when researching domestic worker leader activism for my doctoral study, was the role of religion in developing agency among domestic worker leaders and religion's influence on their need to serve their constituents. Although Paulo Freire argues that traditional religion can be fatalist and functions to preserve the *status quo*, the ability of religious institutions to mobilise women is not a new phenomenon, nor is religion's role in the liberation from other forms of oppression. In this article, I explore the role that religious institutions such as churches have played in shaping the activist identities of domestic worker leaders whom I have interviewed, and the centrality of religion in these women's lives, against a backdrop of their own life circumstances, the employers they worked for, and the larger political climate in their own countries.

KEYWORDS
domestic workers; religion; activism; agency; transnational migration

Surely God does not change the condition of people
until they change that which is in themselves
(Qur'an 13:viii)
(Painted on the wall of SADSAWU[1] Hall at Community House).

Faith is the source of my power
(Iman Ali, the fourth Caliph)
(Painted on the wall of SADSAWU Hall at Community House).

Introduction

In many countries, domestic work as a profession is mainly a legacy of slavery that lasted throughout the colonial eras. In contemporary societies across the globe and countries across the North-South divide, domestic work remains a poorly paid activity, performed by marginalised groups of society – usually by women of colour who are rural migrants and easily exploited. In many Northern countries, migrants usually fill this need for low-skilled or unskilled labour and are often excluded from the protection of important labour laws and regulations. In the Southern

[1] South African Domestic Services Workers Union.

countries, local or other global Southern citizens from poorer and usually rural parts of the countries fill available domestic worker positions.

Events in the last decade on the global stage have heralded a new era for domestic workers, which have afforded them the voice as subaltern that has been silent until now. Despite being constructed as silent and as subjects without agency, unionised domestic workers organised themselves globally, becoming more visible and making their voices heard. This culminated in the establishment of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) in October 2013. From 2013 to date, the IDWF has grown significantly and as of November 2021, the IDWF has 82 affiliates from 64 countries, representing more than 590,000 domestic/household worker members.[2]

The IDWF was mainly formed to globally end the poverty and exploitation of domestic workers, with its strategic goal being the development of the capacity to defend and advance the rights and protection of its members in particular, and all domestic workers in general. Being part of the IDWF, enables domestic worker leaders to engender agency to secure economic, political, and legislative justice and challenge the stereotype of victims. Through their active campaigning to improve the lives of domestic workers, the IDWF became a site of resistance.

For my doctoral thesis, I analysed the subjective life stories of the executive members of the IDWF, to develop a better understanding of commonalities across contexts that might shape such agency and activist identity.[3] However, theorising a feminist analysis of paid domestic work is complex and multifaceted. It requires the simultaneous, intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, nationhood, and citizenship, and a structural critique of how patriarchy and capitalism facilitate the subordination of women and reinforce exploitative relationships between women. After I have interviewed 11 of the 15 executive members of the IDWF, I found that religion would need to be added to any intersectional analysis on domestic worker leadership.

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2 International Domestic Workers Federation, "About Us," https://idwfed.org/en/about-us-1.

3 Susheela Mcwatts, "'*Yes madam, I can speak!' A study of the recovered voice of the domestic worker* (PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2018).

Research Design

My doctoral study on which this article is based, was qualitative.[4] I used in-depth and semi-structured interviews to highlight and understand the various voices and lived experiences of domestic workers. Drawing on the narratives of domestic worker leaders, my study was based on the Feminist Standpoint Theory and framed within transnational feminist practices. The central analytic component of the thesis was the voice of domestic workers as subalterns, centred particularly on their inter-sectional negotiations within the realms of their work. As my aim was to give these women voice through my research process, the feminist methodology was the most appropriate approach for this study, as it allowed me to render visible the complexities of the lives of domestic workers. The data derived from the in-depth interviews was analysed through the use of a thematic analysis.

Through the interviews, I attempted to track domestic worker leaders' paths of agency and the multiple sites of their resistance. Although I was conscious not to essentialise their experiences, I determined the com-monalities that shaped their sense of self as leaders and their activism. I found that many domestic workers referred to God and to religion in their narratives. This article addresses the research question on what the role of religion is in the lives, agency, and activism of domestic worker leaders.

Literature Review

I have not been able to find any literature on the influence of religion on domestic worker activism. However, the ability of religious institutions to mobilise women is neither a new phenomenon, nor is religion's role in the liberation from other forms of oppression. Indeed, liberation theology which emerged in Latin America,[5] focused on the role of human agency in the liberation from oppression. In the social sciences too, many scholars have documented how people pray to reduce stress, and that prayer affects their wellbeing positively.[6] Elizabeth Ozorak, in her research on how women empower themselves through religion, also

4 Susheela Mcwatts, "'Yes madam, I can speak!'"

5 Julius M. Gathogo, Latin American liberation theology: Does it fit in the schema of African theology of reconstruction?', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42, no.1 (2021). 9 pages.

6 Susan Kwilecki, "Religion and coping: A Contribution from Religious Studies," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no.3 (2004): 477-89.

found that women use cognitive strategies and their faith to empower themselves in trying times.[7]

Religion can also have adverse effects on women's career advancement, as many women find themselves confined to domestic work. Nkosinathi Gama and Lodene Willemse argue that historically, religion has been one of the factors responsible for the inadequate educational opportunities offered to women.[8] They refer to the USA as an example where women's education was directed towards studying the scriptures under male supervision and guidance, ensuring that they were not independent thinkers. They also argued that one of the other goals of American women's education historically was to ensure that they were capable of performing domestic tasks within the boundaries of marriage and child reproduction.[9]

The Influence of Religion on Migration

Many domestic workers are migrants, and religion has played an important role in their lives, being in a new destination. The role of religion in the migratory experience has been theorised since the 1950s by Oscar Handlin.[10] According to Julien Debonneville, "religious belonging produces certain forms of symbolic capital and agency that impact all the stages of migration."[11] God is constantly invoked from the departure to entry into the new country and everyday life. Margaret Magat contends that this is probably because migration is filled with adversity and crises.[12] Magat explains:

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7 Elizabeth W. Ozorak, "The Power, but not the Glory: How Women Empower themselves through Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no.1 (1996): 17-29; Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum: New York, London, 1970). 119.

8 Nkosinathi Gama and Lodene Willemse, "A Descriptive Overview of the Education and Income Levels of Domestic Workers In Post-Apartheid South Africa," *GeoJournal* 80 (2015): 721-41.

9 Gama and Willemse, "A Descriptive Overview," 726.

10 Catharina P. Williams, "Female Transnational Migration, Religion and Subjectivity," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 49, no.3 (2008): 344-53.

11 Julien Debonneville, "A 'Minority' on the Move: Boundary Work among Filipina Muslim Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 20, no.4 (2019): 3

12 Margaret Magat, "Teachers and 'New Evangelizers' for their Faith: Filipina Domestic Workers at Work in Italy," *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no.4 (2007): 603-24.

> The process of migration has been described as a "theologizing process" and studies have shown that immigrants not only continue their religious practices in the new country but become more religious than before. If they were not believers before migrating, they become believers when they migrate, with the church and its affiliated groups becoming surrogate extended families. Williams charges that while Handlin documented the significance of religion in immigrant communities in their new destination countries, he did not address the religious networks that support the migrants. Accessing spiritual resources, Williams argues, enables migrants to gain access to a diverse range of power.[13]

When women migrate, their subjectivities shift. Carol Gilligan argues that women acquire a sense of morality that favours care and connection.[14] Her findings are corroborated by Claudia Liebelt's findings in a study of Filipina care workers in Israel.[15] Liebelt argues that to understand the subjectivities of these women, "the understanding of the female political subject has to go beyond conceptualizations of either subordination or subversion, of either repression or resistance."[16] Instead, she argues that the focus should be on women whose subject formation is embedded in Christian practices and morality, which prepare them for "the feminized, racialised and devalued employment niche of migrant care and domestic labour...Their ethical formation is deeply embodied and the remodelling of their envisaged selves ultimately depends on corporeal discipline and training."[17]

Domestic Worker Leaders as Servant Leaders

I found when interviewing the domestic worker leaders in my study, that the Christian practices – care and connection – that both Gilligan and Liebelt speak of, often went hand in hand with a sense of servant leadership. However, I could not find any literature on domestic workers as servant leaders.

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13 Magat, "Teachers and 'New Evangelizers,'" 607.

14 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 18-9.

15 Claudia Liebelt, "On Gendered Journeys, Spiritual Transformations and Ethical Formations in Diaspora: Filipina Care Workers in Israel," *Feminist Review* 97 (2011): 74-91.

16 Liebelt, "On Gendered Journeys," 88.

17 Liebelt, "On Gendered Journeys," 88.

The term "servant leadership" was first coined by Robert Greenleaf.[18] He did not narrowly define the term but broadly encapsulated it as follows:

> The Servant-Leader is a servant first…It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead…The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed?[19]

The central feature of being a servant leader, according to Greenleaf, is going beyond one's self-interest. When people receive services and guidance from others, they will in turn serve and lead more people. The quest of the servant leader is to provide opportunities for followers to grow, while they are motivated by the need to serve.[20] Greenleaf maintains that serving is vital for good leadership, while Saundra Reinke argues that it fosters a responsibility towards the community.[21] According to Dirk Van Dierendonck "serving and leading becomes almost exchangeable. Being a servant allows a person to lead; being a leader implies a person serves."[22]

Chin-yi Chen, Chun-hsi Chen, and Chun-l Li maintain that spirit-centred leadership, including ethical leadership, spiritual leadership, servant leadership, and charismatic leadership, have many common characteristics, and can thus be classified as the transformational leadership schools.[23] The transformational leadership theory stresses leaders' influence on followers, as the leaders "act through vision, intellectual

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18 Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

19 Greenleaf*, Servant Leadership*, 7.

20 Fred Luthans and Bruce Avolio, "Authentic Leadership Development, in *Positive organisational scholarship,* eds. Kim S. Cameron and Jane E. Dutton (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), 241-58.

21 Saundra J. Reinke, "Service before self: Towards a theory of servant-leadership," *Global Virtue Ethics Review* 3 (2004): 30-57.

22 Dirk Van Dierendonck, "Review of servant leadership," *Journal of Management* 37, no.4 (2011): 1232.

23 Chin-yi Chen, Chun-hsi Chen, and Chun-l Li, "The influence of Leader's Spiritual Values of Servant Leadership on Employee Motivational Autonomy and Eudemonic Well-Being," *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no.2 (2013): 418-38.

stimulation, inspiring motivations, and paying individual care" to inspire individuals.[24]

Larry Spears has identified ten characteristics of a servant leader, namely:[25]

1) Listening – emphasising the importance of communication and seeking to identify the will of the people.
2) Empathy – understanding others and accepting how and what they are.
3) Healing – the ability to help make whole.
4) Awareness – being awake.
5) Persuasion – seeking to influence others, relying on arguments and not on positional power.
6) Conceptualising – thinking beyond the present-day need and stretching it into a possible future.
7) Foresight – foreseeing outcomes of situations and working with intuition.
8) Stewardship – holding something in trust and serving the needs of others.
9) Commitment to the growth of people – nurturing the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of others.
10) Building community – emphasising that local communities are essential in a person's life.

Judging by the ten characteristics above, these strands of servant leadership can be found in most domestic worker leaders' stories. However, I am mindful that this theory should not have a deleterious effect on the construction of domestic workers as leaders, as their identity construction is more complex. Furthermore, the terminology and concepts such as "a servant first" and "natural feeling wanting to serve" could harm the hard-won agency of domestic workers. These concepts might reinforce the negative stereotypes associated with domestic work, for instance, that marginalised sectors should want to serve others. I am also aware of the inherent contradiction that the Servant Leadership Theory has been formulated as a management theory for business leaders, and that domestic worker leaders have a working-class identity.

[24] Chin-yi Chen *et al*., "The influence of Leader's Spiritual Values," 420.
[25] See Van Dierendonck, "Review of Servant Leadership," 1232.

The domestic worker leaders whom I have interviewed, had the propensity to attend to the needs of others, which can loosely be described as servant leadership, and I draw on some of their stories below.

Stories from the Heart and the Influence of Religion

The Story of Marcelina

I will start with the story of Marcelina Bautista.[26] Marcelina was from Mexico and was 14 when she became a domestic worker. She came from a low-income family and had many brothers and sisters whom she had to support financially. Marcelina only completed primary school. To escape the grind of her intolerable work conditions, she joined a church group to learn handicrafts, where, extracting verses from the Bible, they reflected on their own lives as domestic workers. Marcelina says that the church gave her a new appreciation of domestic work and an understanding that she could take care of her family through domestic work, something she could not do otherwise. She learnt that domestic work was about a mission to serve and to rescue herself and others by taking back their rights. She also learnt that, although they were not respected as domestic workers, human rights in the workplace are extremely important.

A group of older domestic workers mentored her about domestic work and labour law issues, and by the age of 17, she was organising groups of domestic workers. She states: “So I continued with the working groups, I attended seminars, and my work was to contact other domestic workers, and we got up to 30 women and we went to spiritual retreats, so the retreats were very special, because for example, the priest would speak to us about gender, about sexuality, and self-esteem.”

She thus learned about organising, an activity crucial in activism. She was subsequently invited to participate in a congress of domestic workers from Latin America and the Caribbean, where she learnt further leadership skills. She returned with increased skills to organise her peers and further her own and their education goals, the latter being very

[26] The domestic workers whom I have interviewed, asked that their real names be used so as to spread the message of their activism and the work of the IDWF.

important to her. Indeed, most Mexicans from poorer households emphasise education, and this is well documented.[27]

The empathy for her fellow domestic workers drives Marcelina's commitment to serve and support them. Being a domestic worker herself, she understands their poverty and suffering and the exploitative conditions under which they work. In September 2000, she opened a support, training, and personal development centre for domestic workers in Mexico City. When I interviewed her, the organisation was doing very well. Workers were able to attend training, find jobs, seek advice, and the centre also acted on their behalf in labour disputes.

The Story of Elizabeth

Elizabeth Tang, the General Secretary of the IDWF is a proponent of Freire's liberation theology. In my interview with her she describes how the principles of liberation theology that she learnt at university stayed with her long after she finished university. At university she joined the Catholic Student Federation, and in this organisation she learned about taking care of the poor and marginalised. Although she never worked as a domestic worker, she narrates that she also felt the need to serve. She needed to live Freire's teachings, and the best way to do that was to lend her voice to the plight of marginalised women. In Hong Kong, where she lives, she spent her entire life organising workers. In 1990, she formed the first migrant domestic workers' union, and has since then not stopped representing domestic workers. She maintains that "democracy" and "freedom" are principles by which one should live.

The Story of Myrtle

Wanting to serve, also plays a significant part in Myrtle Witbooi's activism. Myrtle is the President of the IDWF and the General Secretary of the South African Domestic Services Workers Union (SADSAWU). She is past the age where she could retire and do so comfortably. She says that her children have urged her to retire as they can support her financially. They think she deserves a rest and should spend time with them and her grandchildren. Besides, they say, she was not there for them when they were growing up as she was working and was a committed activist. However, Myrtle narrates that she is not ready to relax and just be a grandmother, as her work is still not done. Her

[27] Jayne Howell, "The Dirt Came Up: Domestic Service and Women's Agency in Oaxaca City, Mexico," *City and Society* 29, no.30 (2017): 393-412.

empathy for her peers, her desire to serve them by fighting against their oppression, and the suffering of migrant workers infuse her with the will and determination to carry on with her fight and makes her one of the more powerful domestic worker activists. Her desire to serve other domestic workers stretches back many years. As far back as 1974, she received the Fair Lady award for empowering other workers to speak for themselves – an example of her servant leadership. The award is even more surprising since it was obtained in apartheid South Africa.

Myrtle invoked God often in her interviews with me. She went to a Dutch Missionary School where she learnt to read and write, and she went to church regularly. Education was a tool used by missionaries to convert the coloured and African populations to Christianity, whilst the colonists, Gama and Willemse maintain, wanted Africans to be trained to be good labourers.[28] It would serve the interests of the colonisers if the African population were tradition-bound with no formal education.[29] This reasoning by the colonists was the basis for the "marginalisation of non-whites, particularly black Africans, which started in the colonial era and extended into the apartheid system."[30]

Myrtle was taught by the missionaries how to read and write, but it was shocking for her when she got to know other illiterate domestic workers. She recalls: "That is when the idea came to me to ask them to ask their employers if we could do something on a Saturday, so that they could also learn to read and write. Then the Catholic Church heard about us, and they wanted to help us and that is when they set up this ABC ABED for domestic workers. It started with us, the domestic workers. We decided that we wanted to be educated and we decided we wanted to learn to read and write. That is where the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church got very involved. I remember travelling from Milnerton to Observatory to the Catholic Church where we used to sit on a Sunday afternoon with domestic workers. Lots of domestic workers used to come in there. We also had a training centre in Hanover Park where we used to teach domestic workers, mostly catering for domestic workers. That is how we became involved, but at that time, there were no labour laws."

[28] Gama and Willemse, "A Descriptive Overview," 725-6.
[29] Gama and Willemse, "A Descriptive Overview," 725-6.
[30] Gama and Willemse, "A Descriptive Overview," 726.

The church in Cape Town thus played a pivotal role in increasing the literacy levels of domestic workers at that time. Myrtle's overwhelming desire though, was to help domestic workers. She asserts: "Many people said to me that I should become a women's right activist, or fight for the empowerment of women, but this is what I like: Domestic workers' rights. There are still so many challenges, there are still so many things. Yes, we have fantastic labour laws, but how many domestic workers know about it? How many domestic workers understand it? The employers understand it, so that is our task. You see, we are working with people that for instance, if you give a domestic worker something to do, maybe she did not understand what you were saying, but she is not going to tell you. Late afternoon she will say to you, 'What was that word you said this morning, Sue?' Then you will realise that she was lost. Now you must have the patience to explain to her. Many people will not have that patience to explain to that worker. Whereas I, because I come from there, I understand how I had to learn."

Again, as in Marcelina's case, Myrtle felt that because she was also a domestic worker, she understood her peers and felt the need to help them, showing empathy and stewardship in her leadership style. She attributes her ability to speak out against injustice and not be scared to God: "I think there I discovered that God has given everyone a talent, and my talent was that I could speak and that I don't stand back for the government, and I didn't stand back for employers." Similarly, she attributes the fact that she does not hate her oppressors to God, saying that God blessed her not to hate. She instilled her deep faith in God in her children. She tells me of the time when her daughter was offered a job and did not know whether she could do it, how she went on her knees and asked God for help. Her daughter also went to the Pastor of her church to ask whether she should take the job. Even when Myrtle's son passed his final year at school and thanked her, she said, "God did it." Of her life now, especially the fact that her family is doing so well, she says, "God has been good to me, in fact, God has been great!"

Myrtle's audiences always comment on her ability to speak at large gatherings without any prepared notes. I have seen her in action a few times. She speaks passionately and eloquently, with her audience usually clapping at the incisive points she makes, and she regularly draws standing ovations. She attributes this ability to God. This ability to speak to large gatherings too, placed her on the road to lead workers. This is how it started, she claims, and it is God's doing: "I still didn't know

that time that God has given me a talent. The night we had the meeting here in Salt River, in a hall, there were about 275 domestic workers, and he[31] made a speech for me. I didn't know that I had this talent, and he gave me this speech. As I went to the stage, I had the speech in my hand, and all of a sudden I put the speech away and just started speaking, from who I am, and they didn't know that I was a domestic worker, and immediately, all of us just clicked. We started talking and the workers decided that I was the chairperson. I didn't know what a chairperson was."

After working as a domestic worker, she worked in a factory for a while. In the factory she also became a leader and attributes this to God: "My boss called all of us, 450 people, together to say that the union was there. I also just went to the meeting as I wanted to know what was going on. He said that the union negotiated that everyone got an increase, and I think God made me do it, but I put up my hand, and said, 'Excuse me, Sir, what union was here?' He said, 'Your union.' I again said, 'What union?' The girls were all looking at me, but the factory was just about eight months old. So, I said, 'Why do they come and speak to you? Why don't they speak to us?' I was just asking. All of a sudden, the workers started clapping. Then I said, 'I think we need to talk among each other. Why must we just accept what you are telling us here? I am sorry, Sir. I don't know how these workers feel, but this is the way I see it. This is not right what you are doing. You are actually imposing a R2.00 increase on us,[32] and you don't ask us how we feel.'"

Myrtle showed many characteristics of servant leadership. She was aware of and understood the needs of her peers and was able to communicate them to make a difference. For both Myrtle and Marcelina, the belief in God influenced their leadership style. For Marcelina in particular, it was working closely with religious institutions that led to her servant leadership. For instance, Marcelina recounted: "Sometimes we are asked if we are born or are we formed into leadership, but what I am saying is that some we have, and some we learn. I learned a lot of things because of feeling sad because your work is not valued because your work is being discriminated against. So, I remembered the priest, Ivan, who was our priest who gave us the training and who spoke to us, not as a priest, but as a person who saw us as young people that had dreams

[31] He was a journalist who became her best friend at the time.
[32] South African currency.

and had no other opportunities because of the work that we were doing, in my case, domestic work. We would always come in and share with him what happened during the week. We would say that the employers yelled at us, we couldn't go to school, as we worked too much, or sometimes we would say, 'I don't like this job anymore,' and he would say, 'You cannot feel bad because you are a servant,' and from our reflections, he would say to us that Jesus was also a servant to others, and that he turned the other cheek, but that we didn't really want to turn the other cheek. I think it helped us, little by little."

The priest thus compared their being domestic workers to the servanthood of Christ. Richard Osmer notes that "servant leadership is that which influences the congregation to change in ways that more fully embody the servanthood of Christ."[33] In this sense, the priest was the servant leader, as he influences his congregation to practise servant leadership. The biblical teaching is that a leader has to have the moral power and ability to be humble and willingly serve others, as demonstrated by Jesus who washed his disciples' feet.

As Marcelina and her peers were religious, the priest was able to quote from the Bible to make them feel better about themselves, by making them believe that what they did, mattered and how they mattered, as Christ mattered despite practising servanthood. In this way the stigma of doing domestic work was lessened. By invoking the Name of Christ, he gave them hope, and rationalised the fact that poor women were domestic workers and the exploitation that they had to endure.

The Story of Lita

Another domestic worker activist, Lita Anggraini, was raised in an upper middle-class family in Semarang, a city in Jakarta. She hated seeing poverty of those around her and it troubled her deeply. Her grandmother had a significant influence on her life. She narrates: "My family, especially my grandmother, educated us that we as human beings have a social function and if we do something, you must do it with all your heart, and with love, and you must give your life to the work that you do."

Her grandmother helped her neighbours who were poor and saw to the sick and needy in the neighbourhood. Lita attended university and

[33] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 192.

studied in the Socio-Political Department. Although her parents expected her to find a job in the civil service after graduating, she became an activist and joined a political group. She noticed that poor women suffered the worst forms of oppression. To help alleviate the abuse and injustices that women faced, Lita and her friends formed the Yogyakarta Women's Discussion Forum. The military police, however, hounded them for organising demonstrations and for championing gender equality. Affected by the death of an abused domestic worker in 1992, Lita and her friends decided to concentrate on helping domestic workers.

What was striking about Lita was that she did not speak about her university education much, but about the education she received from her grandmother. With these values in mind, she made fighting against domestic worker exploitation her life's work. She assisted in opening a school for domestic workers that later became a network, and to which five unions were affiliated. She says that doing this was her duty as a woman, as a human being, as a worker, and as a citizen.

Lita chose not to get married, as she says she was too busy as an activist to look for and find a partner. She also mentioned that marrying young in Indonesia was a norm, and as she came from a middle-class family and was the only daughter, it was expected of her. However, her family came to understand her commitment to the domestic worker struggle and was happy as long as she was. This commitment to the marginalised is a feature of servant leadership apparent among most domestic worker leaders. Leadership often involves showing the example of self-sacrifice. Boas Shamir, Robert House, and Michael Arthur maintain that leaders might use self-sacrifice as an expression of loyalty and dedication to an organisation, or a cause, or as a symbolic expression of courage and conviction, and as a strategy to earn credibility and acceptance as a role model.[34]

The Story of Antonio

Antonio[35] from Columbia was also only 15 when she started domestic work. She too showed a kindness and service to her employer who had Alzheimer's, and an empathy to her fellow workers that is reminiscent of

[34] Boas Shamir, Robert House, and Michael B. Arthur, "The Motivational Effects of Charismatic Leadership: A Self-Concept Based Theory," O*rganization Science* 4 (1993): 1-17.

[35] Antonio did not provide me with her surname.

servant leadership. She had the following to say: "I wanted to study or something like that, and I went back to another job taking care of an elderly lady, who suffered from Alzheimer's, but I liked taking care of her. If she didn't treat me well, I would think that she is just sick. For example, she would confuse me with someone at the factory that belonged to her husband. She thought that her husband had an affair, and she confused me with that lady, so she would try to kick me out of the house, hit me with a broom or stab me with a knife. After a while, I wanted to earn a little bit more money, but I didn't move because the husband could not find someone else who was patient with the lady as I did, so I had to stay for another year. I moved away to another family, but I regretted it because I felt it was a bad decision. They [her family] teach you that helping people is good. Since I was a little girl, I liked to help people and they said that it was okay to help people and I felt good doing it."

Empathy and Kindness as part of Servant Leadership

Myrtle showed a similar empathy and kindness to a baby that was burnt that she had to look after. She lived in the backroom of her employer's house in Sea Point. Sea Point is an affluent, ocean-facing suburb in Cape Town. After a year or two with her employers, she got married, but later divorced. As she says, "The trouble started when they said that my husband is not allowed to stay with me." She had a baby that her employer allowed her to keep, but her employer also had a child that was badly burnt and who cried a lot, and in the end, she could not cope taking care of both children. This badly burnt child was the reason for Myrtle giving up her dream of nursing too. She says, "I wasn't interested in nursing anymore because I was working with this family and their one child was badly burnt and wanted my attention, and I loved her very much, so I stayed with them for 12 and a half years."

She had to give her baby to her mother to take care of, as her employer was also going to have a baby and her baby had to be gone by the time her employer was going to give birth. The next time Myrtle saw her baby was when she was one year old and she stayed with Myrtle's mother until the age of 11. Myrtle worked all day and cooked for her employers and in the evening babysat their children, as they enjoyed going out. She shrugs off the unfairness of it all by saying, "Of course with apartheid laws, we couldn't go out late at night, there were no busses, we couldn't go to beaches, [except the dangerous rocky one], nothing like that, because apartheid laws prohibited domestic workers from doing anything

like that. So that was my situation. You stayed in the backroom, reading books, and that is how you got educated, from reading."

Staying with her employers to assist in looking after this child, stems from Myrtle's religious background and her desire to serve those less fortunate than her. Similarly, Hester, the President of SADSAWU nursed her employer throughout his struggle with terminal cancer, having worked for the one family for 25 years and raising their only child. Indeed, care work deeply affects the lives of domestic workers. They enact the spiritual values of care and compassion.

The compassion that Marcelina felt for her fellow workers extended to extreme generosity. When she applied for and received a scholarship for three years with the MacArthur Foundation,[36] she was expected to use the money to further her training on leadership or to attend courses at a university. Instead, she formed the Centre of Support and Training for Domestic Workers. She also used the scholarship to give 40 other domestic workers funding to attend workshops and training. At the end of the three years, she received another scholarship from the Ashoka Foundation for two years.[37] With these funds, she was able to strengthen the base of her organisation. Marcelina practised servant leadership, where it was important to give back to her peers.

As she states, she could have taken the money, received further education and left. However, her commitment to the domestic worker fight would not allow her to do so. She believes she had many more opportunities than others, and she had to give back. Marcelina's story is more remarkable because insufficient money impacted her relationship with her husband, as he too did not have a stable income. Their marriage was put under great strain because of the financial instability. However, instead of keeping scholarships and funding that she received for herself, she shared it with her peers, reflecting her generosity of spirit and her servant leadership. I found the same generosity of spirit in Myrtle's story. Myrtle's husband "had a weakness for women," as she

[36] "The MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, we work to defend human rights" (MacArthur Foundation, "25 Excellent Creative Visionaries Inspiring Change," n.d., https://www.macfound.org/).

[37] "A global organization that identifies and invests in leading social entrepreneurs – individuals with innovative and practical ideas for solving social problems" (Ashoka Southern Africa, "Website," n.d., https://www.ashoka.org/en).

says and divorced her and married a much younger woman. Yet, she still helped him and his new wife to set up a business. Once again though, she attributed her selflessness to God, and said she was blessed because she did not hate.

Religion as a Means to Silence

Although religion has played an important part in the servant leadership of some domestic worker leaders, who also used the church as a vehicle of change and empowerment as witnessed in the stories above, many of the ordinary memberships of domestic workers, especially migrant workers, are silenced through the church because in many instances, the church functions to maintain the *status quo*. As my study was on domestic worker leaders and not the ordinary domestic worker group, I do not have concrete examples.

However, there are examples in the literature, such as a case study related to Filipino migrant workers that illustrate the more problematic discursive functioning of the church in maintaining and rationalising oppression, illustrating how the church can also act as an example of what Pierre Bourdieu termed "symbolic violence."[38] The church can therefore be guilty of "the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognized as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety."[39] It must be noted though, that it is not only the church that is culpable of practising symbolic violence. Employers usually do it as a matter of course. Many domestic workers feel obligated to their employers, as they receive food, second-hand clothes, and the occasional gift. Bourdieu calls it a "mode of domination" and argues that gentle violence is usually used "whenever overt, brutal exploitation is impossible."[40]

The Iglesia ni Cristo is a Filipino church that has expanded to different parts of the world. Religion is very important to the Filipinos, as more than 80 percent of them are Catholic.[41] Pinelopi Topali's study in Greece shows that although the church functions to uphold group solidarity in Filipino immigrant communities, it also serves to silence domestic work-

[38] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge, 1977), 192.
[39] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 192.
[40] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 192.
[41] Magat, "Teachers and 'New Evangelizers,'" 607.

ers. It proposes that obedience is the ideal behaviour for women workers in the employer-employee relationship.[42] The Iglesia ni Cristo forbids its members from joining labour unions. According to Topali, the church itself takes on the function of recruitment agency and the labour union. The church can demand obedience because besides the Filipino nation being mainly religious, there are businesses in the Philippines that only employ church members, as they are the idealised workers. They have to apologise to the church and the businesses they are employed to if their work is deemed unsatisfactory.

In Greece, the church prohibits its members from joining labour unions and recruitment agencies. It also forbids its members from joining the Filipino Workers Association, KASAPI-Hellas, a dynamic immigrant association. Reminiscent of the injunction to Marcelina to follow the example of Christ, Topali maintains that the church requires that "employees are supposed to obey and serve their employers as they serve Christ: like slaves."[43] An official of the church is quoted: "OK, here slaves are the servants. Be obedient to those who are your masters. With good will rent your services as to the Lord. So, the doctrine here, the teaching here is that the servants or the employees when they are working, they should be working as if they are serving Christ himself."[44] The official added: "Slaves obey your human master with fear...and do with a sincere heart as though you were serving Christ. Imagine that? Do this not only when they are watching you because you want to gain their approval, but with all your heart do what God wants as slaves of Christ. Do your work cheerfully as though you serve the Lord."[45]

When questioned on how the Greek employers react to the obedience of their workers, the official said: "She will see that this girl of mine never complains and always does her job and even more than I ask her. And even if she doesn't have a good behavior in the beginning, slowly-slowly she will change. She will become calm and she will love her. And she'll say that this servant is the best I've ever had."[46]

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42 Pinelopi Topali, "Silent Bodies in Religion and Work: Migrant Filipinas and the Construction of Relational Power," *Religions* 4 no.4 (2013): 621-43.
43 Topali, "Silent Bodies in Religion and Work," 627.
44 Topali, "Silent Bodies in Religion and Work," 628.
45 Topali, "Silent Bodies in Religion and Work," 628.
46 Topali, "Silent Bodies in Religion and Work," 631.

Of course, not all workers have bought into the church's ethos. As an informant told Topali: "Yes, sometimes the way they talk, sometimes they talk harshly when you know yourself that you are not stupid at all, and they treat you as one. But we are not slaves! That's sometimes... [laughing]...but...we have to accept that we are helpers…and that we suffer."[47]

This church in Greece functions to exact the obedience from its immigrant community. In similar vein, Magat's study of the Filipino community in Rome also examined the notion of servanthood, and how the gendered interpretation of servitude has a bearing on the belief about domestic worker subservience.[48] Like the domestic worker leaders in my study, domestic workers in her study are involved in church activities because of a belief in God and the church's services. The state structures do not provide migrant workers much assistance in Italy, however, the church plays a significant role in assisting them with services. The church is also a "microcosm of Filipino society, offering familiar cultural traditions, fellowship and belonging."[49] As in Greece, the clergies in Rome also act as employment agencies for migrant domestic workers. However, the services rendered are accompanied by the demand for religious servitude. Magat quotes the following passage from the Bible that is used to justify the subservience of domestic workers: "Slaves, be obedient to your human masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ…knowing that each will be requited from the Lord for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free."[50]

Magat argues that there is no doubt that the Catholic Church in Rome allowed the Filipino immigrants to succeed. However, their biblical understanding of servitude within a colonial cultural context has subjected the Filipino domestic workers to obedience and servitude, to the extent that some workers compare their suffering with that of Jesus Christ.[51] However, the Catholic Church is also known to be progressive in its fights against oppression globally. Both the Catholic and Anglican churches played a significant role in assisting black people in fighting against injustices in apartheid South Africa and had a role in the

47 Topali, "Silent Bodies in Religion and Work," 635.
48 Magat, "Teachers and 'New Evangelizers,'" 608.
49 Magat, "Teachers and 'New Evangelizers,'" 608.
50 Magat, "Teachers and 'New Evangelizers,'" 610.
51 Magat, "Teachers and 'New Evangelizers,'" 610.

liberation struggle. This is also evident from the interview that I conducted with Myrtle, where she mentioned that they sought assistance from the Catholic Church to provide literacy programmes for domestic workers. Nevertheless, the church, especially the Catholic Church, is a patriarchal institution, and the servitude it exacts is gendered, particularly in respect of domestic workers.

However, despite the domestic servitude that workers are conditioned to display, they are still able to develop agency primarily through education. Magat recounts the story of Selica, who worked in Italy since she was 14 years old and dreamt of going to college.[52] However, she was not allowed to leave the house, except on her free days, and even then, she received extra tasks from her employer to complete. Her aunt, though, discouraged her from telling her employer her dreams to study further. Instead, she advised her to suffer and offer her dreams to God and to shoulder the imperfections of her employer as a spiritual challenge. To her aunt's dismay, Selica had the strength to confront her employer several times. She attributed this confidence to each of the travel experiences that she had. Each travel experience brought its education, while a sense of self-esteem and agency often accompanies knowledge.

Conclusion

It is evident that religious institutions such as churches can play a significant role in shaping identities as it is evident in the centrality of religion in the lives of the abovementioned women. Religion has the power to transform women's lives and can either lead to empowerment or domination. It is evident in the lives of domestic worker leaders that being religious and being educated through religious institutions, helped to empower them on their roads to activism.

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[52] Magat, "Teachers and 'New Evangelizers,'" 611.

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Queering the Queer: Engaging Black Queer Christian Bodies in African Faith Spaces

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ABSTRACT
Due to the systemic reality of heteropatriarchy, queer bodies often struggle to find a place of belonging within the African context in general and faith spaces in particular. Even though there has been a shift towards a more inclusive theological discourse within the African Christian faith landscape, the bodies of African *Izitabane* are still predominantly viewed as a Western import and a threat to African culture and its traditions. Because of this, queer bodies continue to find themselves within hostile environments. This has contributed to queer people moving towards alternative spaces of worship and the development of the queer church in which all bodies are welcomed. Although queer bodies have created these alternative faith spaces to move away from the systems of heteropatriarchy that force them to conform to heteronormative standards within the church, a study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, found that queer people often recreate these systems in their own spaces. The pervasive systemic nature of heteropatriarchy finds expression in the insistence on masculine bodies being placed in positions of authority and the exclusive recognition of relationships that conform to heteronormative standards. In the process of trying to escape the confines of a male centred heteropatriarchal African church, we argue that queer people have not succeeded in tapping into the full potential of the power of "queer" as a tool to disrupt and destabilise the pervasive system of heteropatriarchy. Our contribution aims to reflect on our collective queer journey, orientated towards understanding and interrogating the systemic realities underlying and informing the queer appropriation of patriarchy and heteronormativity in African queer faith spaces.

KEYWORDS
queer; heteropatriarchy; heteronormativity; power; black queer Christian bodies

Introduction

Izitabane is a derogatory term used in the African context to mark LGBTIQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and asexual/agender, with the plus referring to other sexual orientations, gender identities, as well as gender expressions that do not appear in the abbreviation) people as the "other" and "outside" the norm prescribed by heteropatriarchy.[1] The otherness of African *Izitabane* is written on the

[1] Although we use the terms "Africa" and "African" throughout this contribution, we do not consider Africa to be homogenous, but rather a richly complex and contextually diverse landscape. Most of our collaborative work speaks to the Southern African civil society, church, and academic context, and the case study that we discuss is located in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

body and informs the vulnerability of queer people in the process of navigating their gender identity and sexual orientation. This makes the body central to the work engaged in this contribution, because the body is symbolic of the systems that uphold society – systems informed by culture and religion, systems such as heteropatriarchy.[2] Heteropatriarchy insists on a binary construction of gender, which aligns biological sex, gender expression, and sexual orientation. However, queer bodies express sex, gender, and sexual orientation outside of the norm and because of this, they are viewed as disruptive and a threat to the "natural" order of the family and the sacred institution of marriage. As a result, queer bodies have become "opposed and denounced" by African political leaders, faith leaders, and cultural custodians.[3] It is argued that queer people have the potential to destroy African traditions and heteronormative family values.[4] These arguments are fuelled by the idea that queerness is a "Western import," threatening the heteropatriarchal values of the Christian church and the African cultural landscape.[5] In order to maintain the stability of the norm that heteropatriarchy prescribes, queer bodies are often excluded, marginalised, and ultimately annihilated. The reality of discrimination against and the marginalisation of the LGBTIQA+ community has contributed to the multiple oppressions faced by the queer community within the African context in general, and within the African faith landscape in particular.

The experiences of exclusion in the African faith landscape have led black queer Christian bodies to "find alternative spaces of worship, where they can be accepted and open about who they are."[6] These alternative spaces move queer Christian bodies from the margins of Christianity to the centre of worship without being forced to conform to gender binaries to become visible in the presence of God, spaces that

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2 Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing body theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 10.

3 Thabo Msibi, "The lies we have been told: On (homo)sexuality in Africa," *Africa Today* 58, no.1 (2011): 55.

4 Msibi, "The lies we have been told," 55.

5 Hanzline Davids, R. Abongile Matyila, Sizwe Sithole, and Charlene van der Walt, "Stabanisation – a discussion paper about disrupting backlash by reclaiming LGBTI voices in the African church landscape" (Johannesburg: The Other Foundation, 2020), 4.

6 Sindisiwe G. Sithole, "An exploration of religio-cultural concepts of transgender identities in Ethiopian Zionist churches in the Midlands, KZN" (Mater's diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2019), 17.

are life-affirming.[7] Although queer bodies have created these alternative faith spaces to move away from the systems of heteropatriarchy that force them to conform to heteronormative standards within the church, the empirical research work that from the basis for this contribution, conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, found that queer people often recreate these systems in their own spaces.

The pervasive systemic nature of heteropatriarchy finds expression in the insistence on masculine bodies being placed in positions of authority and the exclusive recognition of relationships that conform to heteronormative standards. We argue that in the process of trying to escape the confines of a male centred heteropatriarchal African church, queer people have not succeeded in tapping into the full potential of the power of "queer" as a tool to disrupt and destabilise the pervasive system of heteropatriarchy.[8] Our focus of analysis is orientated towards understanding and interrogating the systemic realities underlying and informing the queer appropriation of patriarchy and heteronormativity in African queer faith spaces.

At the centre of our engagement is the reality of the black queer Christian body as a mediator for experience and a site of meaning making and knowledge production. In line with Settler and Engh, we understand that "the body is not simply a site of inscription but also significantly, a site of performance (resistance and self-assertion)."[9] We view "the body as a site of oppression," through which belonging and exclusion are reflected.[10] We further understand queer bodies as active, creative, disruptive, and as a result, susceptible to violence and heteropatriarchal policing and control. In this contribution, we will refer to queer bodies and queer people and by doing this, we refer to those making meaning and navigating identity formation from the reality of a

7 Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical love: An introduction to queer theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 8.

8 Patrick Cheng defines "queerness" as an erasure of what is fixed in society, a disruption of sexuality and gender binaries that keep us from the love of God. Queerness challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality, and because of this, society tries to control its discomfort with queer bodies by pushing them to the margins of human social existence. Queer individuals struggle to become visible, mainly because of the power projected within a heteronormative society that refuses to accept what is considered as different or counter to the norm (Cheng, *Radical love,* 6).

9 Federico Settler and Mari H. Engh, "The black body in colonial and postcolonial public discourse in South Africa," *Alternation Special Edition* 14 (2015): 132.

10 Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing body theology*, 15.

queer embodiment within a heteropatriarchal system. We believe that embodiment, personhood, and community are realities that should be explored in close proximity to each other, and we aim to centre the fluid, complex, messy, and destabilising ways in which the body is central to all of these explorations.

Much of our discussion is based on a research project titled, *Queering the Queer: Engaging Black Queer Christian Bodies in African Faith Spaces*, conducted in 2021.[11] The study examined the realities of black queer Christian bodies located within the South African context in KwaZulu-Natal. The project started by examining the underlying factors contributing to the decisions taken by black queer Christian bodies in the African context to move from "traditionally" heteronormative churches to queer spaces of worship. This project found that although black queer Christian bodies had migrated into queered spaces of worship, it could not escape the pervasive systemic reality of heteropatriarchy.

Our collaboration queers the power relations, traditionally constructed and maintained in the academic landscape when thinking of teachers over students, or supervisors over researchers, when these become interchangeable categories. Our collaboration has stretched and blurred these categories and has placed each of us at various junctions in the position of teacher, student, researcher, collaborator, and colleague.

The lead researcher is a queer activist within the South African landscape, based in KwaZulu-Natal. She is an isiZulu black body in a context of historical racial conflict, a woman in a landscape that shames and silences women's experiences,[12] and a queer Christian individual where any other form of gender identity or sexual orientation other than cisgender and heterosexual is defined as unAfrican. These race, gender, and sexual intersections assist in the process of understanding the pervasiveness of heteropatriarchy and the centrality of the body in the process of identity negotiation and community formation. This woman is both an insider and an outsider, a researcher, an activist, and a scholar looking into the realities informing the experiences of black queer

[11] Tracey M. Sibisi, "Queering the Queer: Engaging Black Queer Christian Bodies in African Faith Spaces" (Master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2021). Protocol Reference Number: HSSREC/00001767/2020.

[12] Jessica Murray, "'And They Never Spoke to Each Other of It:' Contemporary Southern African Representations of Silence, Shame and Gender Violence," *English Academy Review* 34, no.1 (2017): 27.

Christian bodies. The second author is a white queer *womxn* navigating faith, academia, and life as a socially engaged biblical and gender scholar in systems and institutional spaces, deeply informed by hetero-patriarchy. Our collaboration, ongoing conversation, and exploration brings together complex race, gender, and sexuality intersections. It challenges dominant power dynamics and it expands the landscapes of knowledge production beyond that of the academy to include both civil society and faith contexts.

Through this contribution, we reflected on the journey taken to understand the systemic realities that inform the observed phenomenon of queer appropriations of heteropatriarchy. We engage the lived realities of nine black queer Christian bodies within the South African landscape as they share their stories of becoming visible and occupying space as black queer Christian bodies in various queer churches in the KwaZulu-Natal context.[13] We did not only interrogate the power dynamics that inform the situatedness of black queer Christian bodies, but also imagined how black queer Christian bodies could become instrumental in queering spaces of faith and ultimately disrupting the pervasive nature of heteropatriarchy.

Queer Bodies within the African Landscape

As already highlighted above, the human dignity of queer people is threatened within the African landscape, with African leaders viewing homosexuality as "deviant behaviour which is uncultured and un-African."[14] Queer people within this context find themselves in unwelcoming environments that are deeply informed by underlying systems of patriarchy and heteronormativity.[15]

Defined as a penis-centred system, "glorifying and idolizing traditional toxic masculinities and male sexual prowess," patriarchy has been a major underlying factor contributing to the oppression of women and bodies that are regarded as weaker in society.[16] Patriarchy as a system actively informs the lives of women, children, and queer people,

[13] Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 10. The ethical clearance number for the empirical research is HSSREC/00001767/2020.

[14] Lindiwe P. Mkasi, "A threat to Zulu patriarchy and the continuation of community: A queer analysis of same sex relationships amongst female traditional healers at Inanda and KwaNgcolosi" (PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2013), 1.

[15] Mkasi, "A threat to Zulu patriarchy," 14.

[16] Msibi, "The lies we have been told," 60.

determining how they should act, dress, speak, and exist in relation to others in society. Patriarchy is a system that continues to construct and demand an ideal construction of masculinity that is unattainable and unrealistic, fuelling violence, instability, and aggression in those who cannot meet its standards. Patriarchy systemically aligns with heteronormativity to prescribe the pervasive heterosexual norm for the expression of sexuality and the construction of sanctionable relationships.[17]

Deeply informed by culture, religion, and African traditions, hetero-patriarchy has contributed widely to the exclusion and marginalisation of queer bodies within the African context, with the issues of gender and sexual diversity remaining "strongly contested within broader African intellectual framework, especially in religion and theology."[18] Although there are some noticeable shifts in the theological landscape relating to the queer community within the African framework, there remains a substantial divide between the faith actors moving towards inclusion and those strongly determined to exclude "homosexuality as a controversial and divisive topic for many Christians in Africa."[19] Some important examples show the progress being made towards the full inclusion of queer people within their faith settings. Although highly contested, the Dutch Reformed Church made a landmark decision to affirm the dignity of queer bodies in 2015, while the Anglican Church in South Africa has shown an increasing awareness to the reality of LGBTIQA+ rights. There is a visible "destabilization of conservative traditions in which churches have begun to move towards a culture of inclusion regardless of sexual orientation."[20] This, however, is not met with the same energy within some other faith communities based within the African faith landscape. The Methodist Church of South Africa, for instance allows queer ministers to become visible in the church but continues to put a limitation to full identity and relationship expression by setting aside the covenant of marriage as a heterosexual institution.[21] With their sexuality apposing

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17 Melanie Judge, "In the garden of 'good' and 'evil:' Lesbians and (in)visible sexualities in the patriarchy," in *A Consultation Held at Mount Fleur Conference Centre, Stellenbosch*, vol. 5 (2009), 12.

18 Sithole, "An exploration of religio-cultural concepts," 14.

19 Elias K. Bongmba, "Homosexuality, ubuntu, and otherness in the African Church," *Journal of Religion and Violence* 4, no.1 (2016), 15.

20 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 12; also see Davids *et al*., "Stabanisation," 19, 21.

21 Ntobeko Dlamini, "The implications of queer sexuality in ministry: The experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist church of Southern Africa" (Master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2019), 10.

this acceptable norm, queer bodies are viewed as immoral and the act of homosexuality as a sin against nature. The church has played a major role in the discrimination and violence against queer bodies in relation to this.[22] These life-denying realities have forced black queer Christian bodies to leave these spaces informed by heteropatriarchy, and move towards alternative spaces of worship.

Pervasiveness of Heteropatriarchy

Patriarchy has found a way to manifest itself in many ways, however, remaining true to its main agenda which is to privilege the male body over the "other." It has been successful in embedding itself in different structures that hold a great amount of influence in society, which continues to uphold its values, making it difficult to fight against its ideologies, elevating the positions of men in society while oppressing those that are viewed as weaker and passive. Some of these structures have been "equally maintained by those which it has been successful in taming,"[23] grooming women and queer people from a young age through the family, schools, churches, tertiary institutions, and the workplace to know their place in the patriarchal system.[24] Patriarchy has been powerful in that it has been able to socialise men and masculine presenting bodies into believing that they hold a sense of power over the "other" (women and queer bodies) by upholding certain norms imposed by it, such as heteronormativity.

Through heteronormativity, "sexuality has been made a central tool, through which Africanacity is expressed…and is seen as…a marker of citizenship, claiming one's rights and denying other people their rights."[25] Through heteronormativity, bodies become divided in society, first imposing gendered norms that assign a particular sex at birth through the

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22 Mkasi, "A threat to Zulu patriarchy," 35.

23 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 19; also see Nazizwe Madlala-Routledge, "'Reconciliation between men and women,' in T*he evil of patriarchy in church, society and politics*, A Consultation Held at Mount Fleur Conference Center Stellenbosch 5 and 6 March 2009, hosted by Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM), in partnership with the Department of Religion and Theology of the University of the Western Cape, and the Centre for Christian Spirituality, Stellenbosch, 2005, 4.

24 Dennis A. Francis, Anthony Brown, John McAllister, Sethunya T. Mosime, Glodean T.Q. Thani, Finn Reygan, Bethusile Dlamini, Lineo Nogela, and Marguerite Muller, "A five-country study of gender and sexuality diversity and schooling in Southern Africa," *Africa Education Review* 16, no.1 (2019), 22-25.

25 Adriaan van Klinken, "Homosexuality, politics and Pentecostal nationalism in Zambia," *Studies in World Christianity* 20, no.3 (2014), 260.

observation of sexual organs, and second, by imposing the idea that all bodies must conform to a predicted "norm" which maintains that all bodies should commit to sexual relationships with bodies of the opposite sex. For us, it is a life-denying system that is upheld by culture, religion, and traditions that enforce the idea of gender binaries that are viewed as "fixed and legitimate,"[26] discrediting the "other" that exists outside of this norm because of the imposed gender norms, and labelling the "other" as uncultured, unbiblical, and un-African.

Unbiblical and Un-African

While exposing the fear of anxious masculinities, queer bodies have been powerful in revealing the instability of enforced gender binaries that find expression in a fixed and stable normative construction of masculinity and femininity. By destabilising what is regarded to be fixed, queer individuals blur the lines informed by culture and religion. Through their gender performativity and sexual interactions, queer Christian bodies trouble the norm as "outsiders," questioning systems that have labelled them as uncultured and unbiblical, which reveals an instability imposed by the Bible, mainly within Christianity: "With scriptures quoted from the books of Leviticus and Genesis, biblical narratives have been used to support heteronormativity as the divine order of the family, [which demands a] particular sexual system…a compulsory sexuality" that is informed by male privilege.[27] Many male dominated voices have been used to enforce heteropatriarchy, justifying abusive language from the pulpit, which has threatened the existence of queer individuals,[28] labelling queer bodies as *unbiblical* and creating hostile spaces for queer Christian bodies, further enforcing this through culture and traditional practices within the minorities, through their power of naming, enforcing systems of heteropatriarchy that ensure that only "real men" and "real women" exist.[29] African political, traditional, and faith leaders have turned a blind eye through languages that refuse to acknowledge or affirm queer individuals, which is no different in the African faith landscape. African Christian religious leaders have ignored the historical documentation of queer individuals within the African landscape, basing their arguments on the Bible, culture, and Christian faith. They are rather

[26] Msibi, "The lies we have been told," 71.
[27] Sibisi, "Queering the Queer", 24.; also see Judge, "In the garden of 'good,'" 12.
[28] Bernadett Barton, "'Abomination:" Life as a Bible Belt Gay," *Journal of Homosexuality* 57, no.4 (2010): 465.
[29] Judge, "In the garden of 'good,'" 12.

supporting the argument that homosexuality "violently offends the culture, morality, and heritage" of this context,[30] labelling queer individuals as *un-African*, unacceptable, unethical, and unnatural, "a cancer that is eating into the life of the church with the ordination of gay bishops and the recognition given to various people and governments."[31] This perception has led to the development of queer churches.

The Queer Church: A Queered "Norm"

In light of the above, black queer Christian bodies have moved towards the development of queer churches, which are established with the aim to provide safe spaces for those who are regarded as the "disruptive other." "Queer churches move queer bodies from the margins of Christianity to the center of worship without being forced to conform to gender binaries to become visible in the presence of God."[32] These alternative spaces aim to disrupt gender binaries and, in the process, to promote a culture of acceptance and equality in which all bodies are welcome, regardless of their sex, gender, or sexual orientation.

However, while conducting research and gaining insight into the establishment of queer churches within this project, we found that in the process of becoming visible within their own spaces of worship, black queer Christian bodies have resurrected or recreated systems of heteropatriarchy.[33] These heteropatriarchal systemic realities found expression in, among other examples, gendered seating arrangements, the exclusive acknowledgment of relationships that conform to the heteronormative ideal, and a strict adherence to the binary construction of gender.[34] Queer people within these spaces have recreated a life denying system based on heteropatriarchy, failing to move away from a culture of oppression and exclusion.

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30 Kwame Essien and Saheed Aderinto, "'Cutting the head of the roaring monster:' Homosexuality and repression in Africa," *African Study Monographs* 30, no.3 (2009): 127.

31 Kehinde E. Obasola, "An ethical perspective of homosexuality among the African people," *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences* 1, no.12 (2013): 77.

32 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 26.; also see Cheng, *Radical love*, 8.

33 Tracey M. Sibisi, "The development of Queer Churches and the contextual realities that brought them into being" (Honours Research Project, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2019), 43.

34 Mkasi, "A threat to Zulu patriarchy," 51.

The theoretical insights offered by the Queer Theory in general and Queer Theology in particular, are underpinned our engagement with this phenomenon. Queer Theory "challenges and disrupts the traditional notions that sexuality and gender identity are simply questions of scientific fact or that such concepts can be reduced to fixed binary categories."[35] Queer Theology, in turn, helps us to do a theology from the body, allowing us to "expose the voices of those who have been silenced and disempowered."[36] It also helps us to understand what defines a queer space for individuals that are not completely free of heteropatriarchal systems that inform their reality.

As we explored the embodied realities of nine black queer Christian people, representing a diversity in terms of their gender identity and expression of sexuality, we found presented ideas and experiences intersecting gender and sexuality in interesting and complex ways. The process of study became a rich reflection and embodied exploration of what is constructed as normative and how counter normativity is expressed, embodied, and explored. Collaboratively, we engaged the possibility of queer bodies finding validation outside of the heteropatriarchal "norms" of gender and sexuality instilled by culture and religion. We attempted to reflect on the possibility to find ways, if any, through which black queer Christian bodies might destabilise heteropatriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality in faith spaces within the African landscape.

A Queered Method

Our exploration of lived realities outside of the norm called for a queer methodology. Queering traditional methods of research, we used a mixed methodology, which allowed for a deeper engagement of the participants' lived realities and contexts. This methodology allows for the centring of the lived experience of participants, but also for ongoing personal praxis reflection by the main researcher in the process of navigating the research process. A "Queer Sociological Ethnographic Methodology" was employed as a steppingstone in the collection of queering data, by erasing the boundaries of traditional data collection, blurring the lines of time and space as well as the relationship between

[35] Cheng, *Radical love*, 6.
[36] Sithole, "An exploration of religio-cultural concepts," 36.

the researcher and the researched.[37] Through this process, the main researcher became aware of her positionality, understanding that she is an active body within this process and a collaborator in the process of meaning making and knowledge production.

Participants within this study were selected with the aim to reflect on how, if at all, queer bodies could destabilise heteronormative faith spaces. Considering this aim, the profile of research participants required that the participants self-identify as queer Christian individuals who are members of the queer church within the KwaZulu-Natal context in the past two years, and self-identifying as a South African of isiZulu origin between the ages of 18 and 60 years.

We used a snowballing method, reaching out to three members known to the main researcher, who then assisted in identifying suitable participants for the study. The participants included a pastor within the queer church, elders representing a diversity of gender expressions and sexual orientations, and several regular queer church members. The participants represented an interesting sample in terms of marital status, level of education and economic standing, positionality within the church landscape, and diversity in terms of gender and sexual identities.

Taking the realities of the Covid-19 pandemic into consideration, the study moved towards innovative virtual data collection tools, as online platforms were used to conduct a focus-group discussion, as well as individual interviews. Interview questions allowed for discussions that engaged the embodied lived realties of black queer Christian bodies within the African faith landscape and in the process amplified the voices of those that have been pushed to the margins of Christian faith. The employed methodology centred the body in the research process and facilitated reflections on the pervasive nature of heteropatriarchy. Beyond interviews as a data collection tool, and to enable a reflection on gender performativity in the absence of in-person fieldwork, we requested pictures of research participants in which they depicted their dress code for church attendance. We engaged these images in our

[37] Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash, *Queer methods and methodologies: Intersecting queer theories and social science research* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 25; also see Megan Robertson, "Called and Queer Exploring the lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2020), 60.

discussion of the study results below. Finally, a research diary was employed as a tool to enable the main researcher to reflect on her positionality and embodied experience as she conducted the embodied fieldwork. The diversity of methods employed in the data collection process produced rich and complex data and we will discuss some of our main insights and learnings below.

Sitting with the Bodies and Hearing the Voices from the Margins

Using a thematic analysis as our main analytical tool, we identified three main themes in the process of reflecting on how black queer Christian bodies navigate the process of becoming visible in heteronormative faith spaces, and explore possibilities of finding placement within alternative spaces of worship.

1. Alienated in coming out

First, we noted that all participants shared a sense of isolation in the coming out process. Participant 1 noted: "I was a Sunday school teacher…I enjoyed being part of Sunday school with the kids because they do not judge. Someone found out about my sexuality, and I was reported to the elders, and they prayed for me. They did not chase me out, but they treated me differently. It changed the love of God for me. I became a demon. My good work did not matter, so I decided to leave."[38]

The statement illustrates the reality of queer Christian bodies becoming othered within the church because they are homosexual or identify outside of the fixed gender norms as prescribed by heteropatriarchy. The narratives of black queer Christian bodies illustrate how "[t]he body is inscribed into the hierarchies, the inequalities, the roles, the norms, the do's and don'ts of society. As such not the body itself, but what the body should or ought to be, shifts into focus."[39] This inscription of the body moves into sharp focus in the narratives of black queer Christian bodies as they choose to move towards alternative spaces of worship.

[38] Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 75.

[39] Johannes N. Vorster, "The body as strategy of power in religious discourse," *Neotestamentica* 31, no.2 (1997), 396.

2. Liberated and allowed to be

The second key research theme that emerged from the data, illustrated something of a sense of belonging and homecoming in alterative queer faith spaces. Participants indicated that they found solace in a space occupied by other queer bodies and in the process finding a comfortability in each other and the love of God. Black queer Christian bodies found the freedom to exist in a space, fully aware of their own bodies, worshipping together in faith, in spirit, and being themselves. An opportunity to belong is shared by Participant 2: "I was allowed to be myself, allowed to wear pants. They do not look at me, but my faith. I am no longer hindered to be in His presence. I rejoice. There is a spirit of togetherness, I belong where I am."[40]

Participants expressed a freedom to participate and belong, which is an important aspect of being within the church, noting that belonging within the church is "not solitary and individual but communal and engaged with others."[41] The data allowed us to reflect on the individual and collective nature of belonging – a realisation that is often overlooked when a unified space becomes segregated.

3. Unified, yet segregated

The third theme that emerged from the data was an uneasy discovery within queer churches that the reality that they tried to escape, started to pervade their own spaces of worship. The systems of heteropatriarchy have found its way into these queer spaces, creating hostile environments that were forcibly normalising queerness in line with the fixed binary understandings of gender and sexuality. The pervasive heteronormative systemic reality became visible in the instance of placing masculine bodies in positions of authority, enforcing strict gender binaries by using gender specific uniforms, and in the exclusive recognition of heteronormative relationships defined by hegemonic representations of the masculine and feminine.

A pastor (participant 3) within the queer church spoke to this gendered segregation when stating that the system of heteropatriarchy is often even more pervasive in queer spaces: "They have the mentality that we can do it better than heteros, they are forcing things. Uniforms are the

[40] Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 78.

[41] Susan Rakoczy, "Thomas Merton: The true self and the quest for justice," *HTS: Theological Studies* 72, no.4 (2016): 6 of 7.

problem. Uniforms are segregating people and force people to belong somewhere. Sexuality is more about the bedroom."[42] This statement reveals the way in which queer bodies have conformed to a hetero-normative structure of the church. It illustrates the creation of a segregated space, dominated by an imbalance of power and oppression where gender is expressed in a way that is life-denying for those who identify outside of these fixed binary notions informed by patriarchy. Queer churches have become fixated on a person's gender representation, rather than the spiritual needs of those who come to find healing.

We augmented our interview data with the appropriation of an exercise where research participants were asked to share a picture of themselves, showing how they would look when they go to church. The pervasiveness of fixed gender binaries became clear in the way that the participants of this study performed and identified themselves in relation to others within a fixed structure such as the church. We now briefly turn our attention to these images and the explanations offered by research participants as they reflected on their gender representation in the context of church.

In our first example,[43] we have an image of a transwoman, Participant 4, who is dressed in a way that reveals her position as *iDwala* (mother) within the queer church, which is how she identifies herself in relation to God and others. Her experience is that God transitions with her in the process of socially transitioning within the fixed binaries of gender. What we found most interesting in engaging with Participant 4, is how God's pronoun changes in relation to her perspectives of God. In the process of her transition, we find that her image of God is transitioning with her. God becomes what she needs: God becomes the Father, *she* becomes the Mother, and *they* become non-binary when the heart desires it. Moreover, we found that the

[42] Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 80.

[43] Trans identifying participant, "iDwala" in the queer church, has consented to her picture and story being shared for academic and awareness raising purposes.

way she presents herself within the church becomes a reflection of this transition.[44] Here we see her wearing black and purple attire, which are the main colours of the church that she is a member of. Even though she does not go into detail in terms of explaining this outfit, the gap is filled by the following participant (Participant 5) when she explains her outfit and her position within the church. Both participants strongly identify and represent themselves as women in line with a stable binary construction of gender.

Participant 5 is a lesbian woman.[45] She explains: "The colour is black and purple, but you can wear black only. I dress like this because I am a mother within the church, as I told you, I am also married. Therefore, they call me a mother. I am a woman of prayer, and I am married."[46]

Both outfits represent a sense of pride in being a woman, defining their positionality within the church and providing a sense of affirmation in being recognised as a woman. Within their embodiment and identity, both women reflect a resistance to a patriarchal understanding of what it means to be a woman, and in the same breath resisting the "normalization of sexuality, moving out of the limits of heterosexuality."[47] However, the statement made by Participant 5 also illustrates how often the category of women is strongly associated with dominant gender roles such as being a wife to a husband and a mother to a child. Although both women embody positionalities that challenge or resist normative patriarchal understandings of womanhood, it is interesting to note how normative binary understandings of gender are used to reflect on positionality and how it informs gender representation.

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44 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 93.

45 She is a feminine identifying lesbian who demonstrates an interesting mix of femininity and masculinity within her demeaner. She has also consented to her picture and story being shared for academic and awareness raising purposes.

46 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 94.

47 Marcella Althaus-Reid, "On non-docility and indecent theologians: A response to the panel for Indecent Theology," *Feminist Theology* 11, no.2 (2003): 26.

It is clear from the engaged examples above that the queer church still subscribes to strict binary understandings of masculinity and femininity and that it informs gender positionality and representation. It is, however, noteworthy that uniform is central in the process of identity construction and affirmation within the church. The uniform seems to affirm a person's positionality and therefore validates their place within the church. A pastor from the queer church (Participant 6) affirmed this when he explained the importance and meaning of his church regalia.[48]

In this picture, Participant 6 wears a black suit and purple shirt[49] – colours symbolizing power and position within faith spaces as these are colours that are often associated with clergy and church leadership. The gay pastor who is married to a man and raises an 11-year-old biological son, draws on the traditional dress to affirm his power and position within the church. By drawing on the classic dress that signifies church leadership, he disrupts the hetero-normative instance that clergy must be either celibate or married to a woman to be ordained and sanctioned for ministry. Through his presence and gender expression, he shows society that there is a need to queer heteropatriarchal understandings of the church to allow others to find "liberation from cultural and religious oppression and discrimination."[50] We begin to understand that to become a Christian and to be within the presence of God, do not mean to lose yourself, but to affirm yourself in his presence and his image[51] – a realisation that was appreciated by the next participant.

48 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer", 94.

49 This is participant 6 that self-identifies as a gay minister within the church. He is married to a man and has shared that he has a biological son. He has also consented to his picture and story being shared for academic and awareness raising purposes.

50 Mkasi, "A threat to Zulu patriarchy," 16.

51 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 95.

Participant 7 shared this image as a transman who expresses his identity by wearing masculine clothing,[52] which best shows his positionality in relation to others. In this picture, he wears the uniform of the church that he belongs to. While simultaneously subscribing to the masculine norms as prescribed by heteropatriarchy, the outfit also challenges what society believes to be the accepted gender performativity for a female born body by the "erasing or deconstructing of boundaries, particularly with respect to the essentialist or fixed binary categories of sexuality and gender."[53] Through this, he helps us in understanding that gender is performed, and it is not fixed, but fluid: "Gender and masculinity are socially constructed – masculinity is a gender and not a natural attribute."[54] This implies that gender and masculinity can be defined by the self for the self, that it is fluid and can change over time, which is something that gives Participant 8 affirmation within the church as a black butch lesbian body within the queer church.

In this picture, Participant 8 portrays a female masculinity,[55] which is viewed as the "production of masculine subjectivities by biologically female individuals."[56] The image represents a rejection of normalised understandings of female performativity as defined by traditional ideas of gen-

[52] Participant 7 self-identifies as a transgender man who appreciates the role of patriarchy within the church. This participant also consented to his picture and story being used for academic and awareness raising purposes.

[53] Cheng, *Radical love*, 8.

[54] Msibi, "The lies we have been told," 71.

[55] Participant 8 self-identifies as a butch lesbian and a preacher within the church. This participant also consented to her story being shared for academic and awareness raising purposes.

[56] Tommaso M. Milani, "Querying the queer from Africa: Precarious bodies – precarious gender," *Agenda* 28, no.4 (2014): 80.

der. In the picture, Participant 8 is holding a Bible that is symbolic of her agency as a black queer Christian person to draw on the resources of faith to inform the process of sense making and meaning making.

All these images reveal the way in which gender is performed and how deeply this is influenced by pervasive heteronormative constructions of gender and sexuality. Although all the queer bodies engaged during the data collection and analysis for this study, in fixed constructions of binary gender representation, they also recreated and reinforced these fixed and stable categories in their own gender expression. The representations revealed something of the desire to belong and to become, but also how this desire can reinscribe the categories that we try to dismantle or escape from. In the process of gender representation, queer bodies could paradoxically trouble fixed binary constructions of gender and simultaneously reinscribe the binary notions of gender as dictated by heteropatriarchy.

When Things get Complicated

In the process of collecting data and making visible the narratives of those who have often been banished to the margins of Christian faith, we took note of some of the hindrances or complexities in engaging black queer Christian bodies. We engaged in these reflections as part of our ongoing process of knowledge production and meaning making when engaging black queer Christian bodies in African faith landscapes.

The first challenge that we identified was that of language. Language is a powerful tool that affirms and oppresses, and the oppression became poignant in our research when names used to describe queer people were used in a negative sense, or when the words used to make sense and meaning were not accessible in one's own indigenous language. This form of oppression and misrecognition was articulated by those participants who expressed that they struggled to positively affirm themselves as queer individuals in the isiZulu language in their process of identity construction and navigation. As a result, participants often switched to English to find a more comfortable term to address the topic of gender, sexuality, and queerness. This was a troubling reality, revealing how "the relationship between language and gender has largely reflected how linguistic practices, among other kinds of practices, are

used in the construction of social identities relating to issues of masculinity and femininity."[57]

We started this contribution by reflection on the derogatory nature of the term *izitabane* that is often employed in local communities to other, shame, and violate queer people. In line with the impulse of the Queer Theory to radically reclaim al that is derogatory, we argue for the *stabanisation* of terminology. Rather than remaining within a derogatory discourse, we propose a reclaiming of the term *izitabane* to affirm the visibility of queer bodies within their own context, so that they no longer feel the need to use another language to feel comfortable in such conversations.[58]

The second issue that we identified is that of power. All dimensions of the process and levels of engagement, analysis, and interpretation were steeped in complex power dynamics. Besides navigating the power dynamics between researcher and research subjects, and researcher and supervisor as we navigated these different roles, we also became aware of other less obvious power dynamics in the data collection phase. Although there are more examples to highlight the complexity, we limit ourselves to two examples here.

First, in the data collection process, one of the participants indicated that they needed a person of authority to give them permission to tell their story, indirectly reflecting the power dynamics within the church, opening our eyes to the "contrasts between understanding the relationship between 'power over' (power obtained by one over the other) and 'power to' (power efficacy, or life-giving to the other)."[59] Our second observation links to an incident where a participant felt the need to apologise to the religious leader present before sharing something that could seem to be negative about the church, revealing the fact that calling out patriarchy in the presence of authority will always be a difficult task. It became apparent that "one of the difficulties of studying power is that it is not one thing to be observed," which also raises awareness of the complexity of power.[60] The complex and multi-layered reality of power within social

[57] Michael Williams, "Cultural identity, language identity, gender identity," *English Academy Review* (2011): 3.
[58] Davids *et al*., "Stabanisation", 9.
[59] Roy Kearsley, *Church, community, and power* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), 10.
[60] Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition* (London: Cassell, 1998), 9.

spaces informs our commitment to continued contextual and academic work, aimed at a troubling dominant power discourse and critical reflections on the systems of oppression and exclusion.

Third, as stated at the outset of this contribution, we started our critical reflection from the centrality of the body as a sight of meaning making and knowledge production through which validation, belonging, and exclusion is experienced. We understand the body to be the starting point for all theological reflection as we note that "the body is symbolic in human culture, it is the means by which the person and the community express themselves."[61] Through these engagements, we began to understand "what it means to be human in a way that is no longer defined by a dominant culture," but at the same time understanding the vulnerability of a longing for affirmation and confirmation of identity and belonging from cultural spaces.[62] We again realised that "it is hard to talk about African queer bodies without talking about culture, spirituality, and religion as they form part of who we are."[63] These notions and institutions are foundational to African identity, which then becomes the site of great disruption for the individual and the community when having to engage or navigate bodies that do not conform to the normative.

We remain committed to the creation of open theological spaces that address the failure of the church to understand that "we are body-selves that are gendered biologically and sexually, who have varying sexual orientations, who need intimacy, who have conflicted feelings about what it means to be bodied."[64]

There is a clear gap between theological discourses leaning towards inclusion and the experiences of queer bodies within the church. This also rings true for black queer Christian bodies in queer spaces of worship. The pervasive power of heteropatriarchy within the church in the African landscape becomes apparent in "prescribing roles, values, expectations, and responsibilities – dictating – socially appropriate ways of feeling, thinking, and doing."[65] These normative notions "constitute an abuse of power against those who are perceived as deviant, weaker, or

61 Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing body theology*, 10.
62 Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing body theology*, 22.
63 Sithole, "An exploration of religio-cultural concepts of transgender," 18.
64 James B. Nelson, *Body theology* (Louisville, KY.: John Knox Press, 1992), 45.
65 Judge, "In the garden of 'good,'" 11.

socially unnormalized."[66] In this context, it seems imperative to "call out processes that are informed by heteropatriarchy within these spaces, contributing to the exclusion of some bodies within the church when realized."[67] We need to scrutinise "the continued marginalization of, and the attack on those whose sexualities do not conform," even when the church goes against what we understand to be the purpose of a queer space.[68] We cannot fully "experience a queer environment while drawing on the heteronormative understanding of relationships, as well as the patriarchal understanding of hierarchal rule within the church."[69]

Imagining the Potential of Queer

Queer bodies are constantly being placed at the centre of theological discussion and church conversations and are predominantly conceptualised as a disruption of the normative, a sin, and as an abomination. Queer people are, however, very seldom agents within these discussions, but rather considered to be a topic of discussion or an uncomfortable point on the agenda of a church meeting. Although there is a growing discourse developing in the African faith landscape, leaning towards the inclusion and affirmation of queer lives and queer experiences, the overwhelming nature of the conversation remains life denying in nature and contributes to the exclusion of queer individuals and at its most extreme, to violence. In response to these experiences of exclusion and marginalisation, we note the migration of black queer Christian bodies to alternative spaces of worship where the possibility of homecoming, care, and recognition exit exists.

Our contribution, however, highlights that it is not a simple matter of finding an alternative space to cure all oppressions because even in these alternative queer spaces we find the pervasive systemic results of heteropatriarchy.

Queer Theory and Queer Theology enable us to trouble the normative nature of heteropatriarchy by centring the experiences of queer people in the African landscape, by not asking what bodies should do, but rather

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66 Selina Palm, "Reimagining the human: The role of the churches in building a liberatory human rights culture in South Africa today" (PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2016), 58.

67 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 112; Palm, "Reimagining the human," 235.

68 Judge, "In the garden of 'good,'" 11.

69 Sibisi, "Queering the Queer," 113.

using what bodies are doing as the starting point for theological engagement. As argued elsewhere in an initial collective discussion document, we outlined the contours and the central ideological strands offered by the *Izitabane zingabantu Ubuntu* theology.[70] This Queer Theology for an African context "calls for an embodied reclaiming of all that is life-affirming within faith landscapes, reimagining community and the engagement with the sources of faith and remembering of communal sacramental identity."[71] We believe that the liberation for black queer Christian bodies lie in the radical reclaiming and brave imagining of what it truly means to be queer in Africa.

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[70] Davids *et al*., "Stabanisation."
[71] Davids *et al*., "Stabanisation," 9.

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Roundtable Discussion from the Annual Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice Public Lecture on Economies of Violence

Sa'diyya Shaikh
Fatima Seedat
Farah Zeb

Introduction

In South Africa, the month of August is marked by two significant events in the country's history: The anti-apartheid women's march which happened on 9 August 1956 and the Marikana massacre on 16 August 2012, in which 34 miners were killed by the police at the Lonmin mine. These events bring up for scrutiny the "Economies of Violence" that continue to sustain the indignity and the poverty which women, queer people, and marginalised black people in South Africa disproportionately experience. The Covid-19 pandemic has simply exacerbated this reality. Recognising the multiple factors which shape access to justice such as gender, religion, race, and class, the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice annually convenes various public and scholarly conversations on these subjects. The 2021 symposium considered the importance of resisting/transcending the epistemic violence which demands that black women focus on research and teaching that is perpetually located within pain and suffering. By doing so, the keynote presenter, Prof Sa'diyya Shaikh, and respondents, Dr Fatima Seedat and Dr Farah Zeb, also considered the spiritual reflections and practices which bring us joy and rest.

Islamic Feminist Imaginaries: Love, Beauty, and Justice

Keynote: Sa'diyya Shaikh[1]

[1]SHORT BIO
Sa'diyya Shaikh is Associate Professor in the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Cape Town. Her research focuses on Islam, gender, and sexuality with a special interest in Islamic Mysticism, Feminist Theory, and Muslim Ethics.

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One of the most profound universal challenges to human beings in the twenty-first century is to enable collective transformations that create nourishing modes of being for all lives and for this planet. We are required, indeed obliged to bring to the table of humanity the very best from each of our distinctive traditions, so that life on earth – human and non-human – can be sustained. In seeking to embody the good, the moral, the just, and the beautiful, in essence the virtuous, there is a need for dynamic and engaged reflections on our living traditions of ethics in response to the problems we are confronted with on a local and global scale.

Any attempt to simultaneously reflect critically on the economies of violence that we are located within, while seeking to invoke life-sustaining and joyful resources of being, requires on the one hand, a critical, clear, and unflinching appraisal of our current challenges, and on the other hand, a refusal to being trapped in the resulting pain – a tough call. However, that is indeed the nature of feminist scholarship. Feminist work is generally a "tough call." As the queer theorist, Sara Ahmed has noted, feminists are often called the "killjoys," the ones who expose the illusionary nature of happiness sustained through structural inequality.[1]

While there is a moral imperative to be a killjoy in contexts of oppression, calling out constantly against complicity, silence, heedlessness, and illu-

[1] Sara Ahmed, "Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness," *Signs* 35, no.3 (2010): 571-94.

sionary constructs of peace and happiness, epistemically and emotionally it is a heavy burden. This toll is compounded in the current time, when so many people on this planet are materially and psychologically overwhelmed by the socio-economic toll of Covid-19. In the South African context, the weight of the pandemic has been intensified by the impact of the recent violence and anarchy in KZN and Gauteng,[2] as well as the racist macho-vigilante murders in Phoenix,[3] while on the international stage, we witness the Taliban's seizure of control in all the major cities in Afghanistan, with severe and devastating implications for the rights and integrity of Afghani women. Locally and globally, we are in such a collective state of pain and constriction that any sense of joy and rest feels like an impossible task. Amidst what is feeling unceasingly like a world turned upside down, the call for reprieve and rest is more urgent, but ever more elusive: How might we engage between this rock and hard place? Today I offer a partial reading of the nature of this challenge before presenting some reflections on directions to explore for spiritual sustenance and respite.

A formidable challenge for our age is to replace paradigms of domination with those embedded in reciprocity, mutuality, love, and justice. From Phoenix-KZN to Kabul-Afghanistan, from Minneapolis-USA to Delhi-India, we are acutely aware that the current global political landscape is a stage for toxic masculinities running rogue. Traversing religious and secular spaces, a marked phenomenon of our time is the unapologetic forms of rapacious male power. Increasingly, human vices socially manifested as sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, ecocide, and xenophobia, among others, are unashamedly paraded in the varying political theatres of the world, causing tremendous suffering to the vast majority of human beings as well as the destruction of various other forms of life across the planet. Modes of power and authority, exercised in the interests of small male elites, have not only resulted in gross socio-economic inequalities, but also compromised the ultimate survival of the earth.

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[2] Social unrest, purportedly triggered by the imprisonment of the former President Zuma, spread into wide-spread rioting, chaos, and lawlessness in Gauteng and KZN in South Africa from 8-19 July 2021. Social analysts argue that the enduring systemic economic inequality in South Africa, continuing in the post-apartheid era, compounded by Covid-19 and the related loss of jobs, aggravated socio-economics hardships, and the state of chaos escalated quickly, resulting in the death of more than 300 people.

[3] See a compelling view on the Phoenix violence by Sarojini Nadar, "A time for collective grief: Reflections on the *Phoenix* Massacre," 29 July 2021, https://mg.co.za/opinion/2021-07-29-a-time-for-collective-grief-reflections-on-the-phoenix-massacre/.

Ecofeminists have long pointed to the common root of domination, characterising patriarchal capitalist structures that privilege men over women, and exploitative modes of human engagement with the earth, and non-human environments. The enormity of the current ecological crisis bears a painful testimony to the ways in which these masculinist modes of power have caused extensive planetary destruction – climate change is but the tip of the iceberg.

Gus Speth, professor of environmental law, astutely observed in 2013 that the catastrophic ecological state of the world is at its core a spiritual crisis:

> I used to think that top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address these problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy…and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation, and we (lawyers) and scientists, don't know how to do that.[4]

Speth alerts us that a crucial dimension of the ecological crises is symptomatic of an underlying poverty of human virtue at the collective, political level. Indeed, one of the root causes of the manifold social, political, and ecological disasters which we confront today is our collective spiritual deficit.

There is ample evidence that many prominent contemporary leaders function at the lowest level of human consciousness, embodying negative qualities and vices within communities that have in some way enabled their rise to power. The imperative for social transformation, within which human beings as a collective foster virtue and refrain from vice, is not simply about an individual quest, but has extensive political consequences. If indeed the central root of the problem is spiritual, the cure must also involve inner renewal and modes of personal ethics that manifest in more virtuous publics. While systemic injustice cannot be solely redressed by a revitalisation of individual ethics, nonetheless the renewal of spirituality and the cultivation of virtue remain one crucial

[4] Gus Speth, "A New Consciousness and the Eight-fold Way towards Sustainability," n.d. https://earthcharter.org/podcasts/gus-speth/.

component among others, in addressing the social challenges of our time.[5]

A deeper response to the current socio-political crises, therefore, includes attentiveness to the organic relationship between the individual and the society, and the intimacy between the spiritual and the political realms. Indeed, all great prophets, sages, and wise leaders from varied cultures and histories, brought teachings that integrated the cultivation of the inner self in ways that had profound social implications – prophets were often rejected by the powerful elites of their societies, precisely because their revolutionary spiritual imaginaries shifted modes of social power.

Since my approach to religion is one that focuses on the spirit of revolutionary change, it is appropriate to reflect briefly on the idea of tradition. Human beings are as much the shapers of religious traditions as they are recipients of it. The persistent assumption that any religion including Islam is fixed, handed down, and already determined, and that believers should simply submit and follow, is sociologically and historically inaccurate. Any cursory historical appraisal will reveal that religions are not only handed down to people but are also continuously in the process of becoming through the lives, ideas, contributions, innovation, reformulations, rejection, embraces, and meaning-making actions of its adherents.[6]

People are sometimes more easily aware of the dynamic nature of religious meaning-making at the personal, individual level. It is often easier to recognise in the context of our everyday experiences that one's spiritual path is influenced by varying experiences. We know that there are times when we encounter our own strengths and gifts beautifully,

[5] Drawing on Kantian ethics, philosopher Lucy Allais alerts us that in conditions of structural injustice we cannot remedy the situation solely through individual action or virtue, but we require political change. See Lucy Allais, "Deceptive Unity and Productive Disunity: Kant's Account of Situated Moral Selves," in *Kant on Morality, Humanity, and Legality,* eds. Ansgar Lyssy and Christopher Yeomans (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3.

[6] Shahab Ahmed's *What is Islam*, despite a dismal lack of attention to questions of gender, nonetheless provides an illuminating archive of the dynamic nature of the Islamic tradition and Muslim creativity within tradition over a period of 500 years (fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries) in diverse geographical regions ranging from the Balkans to Bengal. See Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

and yet other times where we have come up sheerly and nakedly against our own weakness and limitation. We might remember times when we have extended ourselves beyond what we thought capable, and other times when we were more constricted and in pain than we had thought we could have borne. We might recall times when we have known our own power to touch another life with love and compassion, and yet other times that we have been so deeply vulnerable, subject to the pain inflicted by another, or incapacitated by the pain that we might have inflicted on another life – we know intrinsically that this range of experiences of ourselves and our world requires dynamic responses from us if we want to grow.

Conscious human beings recognise experientially that the spiritual and ethical path requires presence and responsiveness to the moment, a recognition that for any deeper discernment and cultivation, we must consistently seek to calibrate with the higher qualities and attributes within ourselves. We need a similar sort of awareness and dynamic engagement with religious tradition as it relates to the social sphere, taking seriously the moral agency, responsibility, and accountability that we have as human beings in creating a more just, humane world for all beings – human and non-human.

Some religious people, particularly in times of uncertainty and strained social circumstances, want to relieve their anxiety and insecurity by appealing to an imagined construct of the past that provides clear and undisputable answers. However, if our relationships to the past do not allow us to dynamically respond to the changing needs of our current social contexts, stagnation, imbalance, and destructiveness will inevitably ensue. In my view, these forms of harm are reflected in religious communities – my own included – when we do not effectively engage contemporary challenges to redress gender, sexual, racial, and environmental justice. It might include, among others, the more obvious cases of unjust marital rights in the family, discriminatory divorce procedures, unfair custody rights, denigrating same-sex sexuality, exploitative racist employment practices, and abuse of the earth's resources, to name but a few.

Responsive to our contexts, it becomes imperative for conscientious believers to engage prevailing interlocking systems of oppression, atten-

tive to what the Qur'an calls the *ayat* or signs appearing on our contemporary horizons[7] – and these signs include our evolving sensibilities of justice. Being enriched by tradition, is to boldly embrace one's own role in creating and crafting contemporary living forms of religion, rather than being hostage to an authoritarian image of the past. As astutely observed by the early twentieth-century reformist Jewish Rabbi, Mordecai Kaplan who highlighted the importance of dynamic Jewish responses to the contextual ethical demands of the time, inherited tradition has "a vote and not a veto."[8]

Islamic feminism proceeds from a vision of an imaginative and lively dialogue between core values of the Muslim past with those of the present, in order to contribute meaningful understandings of Islam in relation to questions of gender ethics and social justice. Reading the contemporary horizons as a believer, I am inspired by a central spiritual teaching at the core of my tradition, the insight that love and justice are integrally connected, that divine love is at the root of all existence and is the ontological or original womb of justice. In this regard, the Qur'an clearly states that the command of God is *adl wa ihsan*, *adl* meaning *justice*, and *ihsan* – a more nuanced Arabic word – best translated in my view as 'goodness' that encompasses dimensions of beauty, love, and virtue collectively. In my analyses, when the impetus for social justice is driven by love, it is at its most potentially transformative and powerful.

Anger is an important and effective reactive weapon that can powerfully ignite justice-based movements. Indeed, the suffering created by the prevailing economies of violence *must* elicit anger, resistance, and rejection, born of righteous rage. However, anger cannot ultimately nurture the higher. Anger might push some among us to action, but anger does not truly enable growth and expansion. I suggest that for justice to ripen into a truly transformative and sustaining force, it must draw back from that deep current of love, and this is where we dive into for respite, rest, rejuvenation, replenishment, and creativity.

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[7] A popular Qur'anic verse (41:53) invites human beings to respond to the social context as part of a response to the Divine: "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not enough for them to know that the Sustainer is witness over everything?"

[8] Rebecca T. Alpert, "Reconstructionist Judaism in the United States," *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, 23 June 2021, https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/reconstructionist-judaism-in-united-states.

To many people, the term "love" is nebulous and difficult to define. For some people, it is a feel-good emotion or related to a private experience, which is not essentially about social transformation. For others, notions of love have been manipulated theologically and socially to subordinate and even colonise groups of people, purportedly for their salvation. In intimate relationships within patriarchal societies, love is sometimes invoked instrumentally to serve inequitable roles and asymmetries of gendered power. As such, love can be a messy and even an abused concept in our experiences and histories. However, I retrieve and reclaim a vision of love as a transformative political force. Following in the footsteps of some of the great prophets and social reformers, I focus on love as a universal spiritual legacy of humankind that can potentially calibrate human beings to higher forms of consciousness, heralding nourishing forms of relationality for individual and collective flourishing within a society.

To reflect on the deepest spiritual source of love, there is an evocative Muslim tradition (*hadith qudsi)* in this regard, where God purportedly said, "I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the world so that I might be known."[9] Many Muslim thinkers have reflected extensively on this tradition, using it as a starting point for understanding human nature and a relationship with God. Within this religious imaginary, it is a divine yearning, longing, and love to be known intimately that is the very impetus for creation. Love is thus lodged in our innermost beings. It is the original divine imprint on every life – we are all mirrors of a divine love seeking to reflect its "hidden treasure." However, what is this "hidden treasure?" Muslim scholars have understood this to refer to divine qualities or attributes which are embedded in creation as part of our original nature or constitution, the spiritual birthright of every life, and which every human being and all creation have been gifted with.[10] Within the Muslim tradition, the divine attributes that humanity must foremostly embody, are mercy, compassion, generosity, and justice. Here another Muslim tradition (*hadith qudsi*) is helpful in highlighting the appropriate forms of relationality in contexts of need and inequality:

[9] For a discussion of this *hadith qudsi*, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 268; and Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*: *Ibn 'Arabi, Gender and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 69-76.

[10] William Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 93.

> [God] descends to stand in our place, such that when one of Her servants is hungry, God says to the others, "I was hungry and you didn't feed me" and when one is thirsty, God says to His other servants, I was dying of thirst and you didn't give me water and when another of Their servants was sick, God says, "I was sick and you didn't attend to me." And when those servants ask God about all of this, God says to them, "As for the one who was sick, if you had tended to him, you would have found me with him. And when someone was starving, if you had fed her, you would have found her with Me and so for the one who was thirsty, if you had given them water you would have found Me there" (*Hadith al-qudsi*).[11]

This popular Muslim tradition, with its evident biblical resonance,[12] indicates God's presence among "the least," those occupying marginal and liminal social spaces. Divine love and mercy are such that God partakes in the conditions of one's deepest human needs. Here, each person is compelled to respond compassionately to the needs of those who are weakened through illness, hunger, and thirst. I interpret these conditions of need as both physical and metaphorical – hunger, thirst, and illness include a physical and socio-economic vulnerability, as well as other intersecting axes of social and political precarity, whether it is the result of sexist and homophobic cultures, racism, or any other context of human suffering due to structural injustice. As such, I propose that a response of care, protection, and upholding justice towards a fellow human being in situations of oppression, is in effect a response to the divine presence.

Therefore, enacting compassion and justice is not merely an act of extension to another human being, it is an act of connecting with the Divine Beloved. As such, the person who extends to those in need, who acts with fairness and justice in their personal relationships to other lives, is not simply the benevolent person who attends with merciful compassion to a marginalised "other." In fact, responding compassionately to adversities and challenges faced by a poor, hungry, ill, or oppressed person paradoxically provides a fertile opportunity for a fellow human being to encounter the Ultimate Source. Moreover, the oppressed or hungry person is not merely instrumental or an intermediary, but in and

[11] Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-makkiyya*, Vol. 2 (Cairo: n.p, 1911), 596.
[12] See for example Matthew 25:34-45 in the Bible.

through that person's predicament, the Divine as the embodiment of love, is fully present, inviting compassionate and loving human engagements. This reading of the spiritual dynamics within such relationships disrupts and subverts traditional power relationships between giver and recipient, between the powerful and the powerless. In reality, both parties in this relationship give and receive divine mercy – the humanity and divinity of each are tied to the other and everything is an unfolding of divine love.

From this perspective then, love is a radical transformative force that engages the fullness of one's being and extends to other lives and into the realm of society as a means of deep encounter. Love is the primary creative force for existence, and the highest call of human community, and is always intimately tied to justice. This insight also emerges within other religious and ethical traditions pithily captured in the well-known aphorism by contemporary philosopher and social critic, Cornell West, "Justice is what love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what love feels like in private."[13]

The intimate connection between love and justice demands that we rethink models of power, and here feminists have long reflected on the importance of turning away from discriminatory hierarchies towards reciprocity and mutuality. I find a deep resonance between the work of many Islamic feminists who focus on the central religious imperatives that embed love, with justice as an integral ethical imperative, and the emergence of what is increasingly been called "love ethics" or "love politics" more broadly amongst black feminist scholars.[14]

The Islamic philosopher Zahra Ayubi points precisely to this synergy when surveying Muslim love ethics as it takes form among Muslims who are active in the *Black Lives Matter* movement. She describes this emerging current of love ethics as a constructive attempt to create anti-oppressive communities "for the love of the tradition and fellow Muslims with an eye to the future. Muslim love ethics is not just concerned with assigning moral language to women's everyday resistance…but is

[13] Cited in Takim Williams, "*#in Context: Cornell West*," 22 February 2017, https://www.traffickinginstitute.org/incontext-cornel-west/.

[14] Zahra Ayubi, "Islamic Gender Ethics: Traditional discourses, critiques and new frameworks of inclusivity," in *The Routledge Handbook of Islam and Gender,* ed. Justine Howe (New York: Routledge, 2021), 57-67.

concerned with moral language that characterizes an egalitarian future."[15] Indeed, these moral languages of love and justice are presently taking form in various forms of community-making the world over. I would like to offer examples of two initiatives that I am involved in, which reflect new moral narratives and alternative forms of community, embodying in my view an aspirational "love ethics."

The first example is a forthcoming anthology of contemporary Muslim women's sermons that Dr Fatima Seedat and I conceptualized, titled *The Women's Khutbah Book: Contemporary Sermons on Spirituality and Justice from around the World*. While there is a traditional genre of sermons or *khutbah* compilations within Muslim cultures, these have historically been a male preserve, written and presented exclusively by men. Given the burgeoning spaces of Muslim women's religious leadership and spiritual authority in varied contexts globally, Muslim women are currently producing new and vital bodies of religious knowledge, grounded in commitments of love, spirituality, and justice. Our book, the first of its kind, aims to instantiate, mark, authorise, and celebrate these transformative visions of Islam and inclusive leadership. It includes contributions from diverse women ranging from South Africa to Senegal, Britain, the USA, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Germany, and Denmark. The collection both continues an established literary tradition of sermon (*khutbah)* compilations in Muslim societies, while fundamentally transforming, expanding, and innovating that genre. Further, by locating itself within as established Islamic genre, it serves to simultaneously archive and authorise contemporary Muslim women's spiritual authority. Dynamically balancing continuity and change, this archive reflects a contemporary form of gender-inclusive tradition-making within Islam.

Within the book, Fatima and I bring the insights of these contemporary women *khatibahs* into dialogue with a marginalised historical legacy of insubordinate Muslim women who have actively contested injustice. In this theorisation, we render visible existing histories and spirited feminist legacies within Islam that have often been suppressed or ignored by mainstream patriarchal approaches, and which allow us to expand the notion of what in fact constitutes Muslim "tradition." Resisting gender injustice in this reading of history is an intrinsic part of being traditional. Locating contemporary Muslim women in a robust and powerful historical lineage, we argue that our collective spirited resistance to injustice is

[15] Zahra Ayubi, "Islamic Gender Ethics," 65-6.

both traditional and innovative. In being responsive to the ethical challenges and social issues of our day, it opens up vibrant imaginaries of love and relationality while reframing dominant understandings of the past and reconstitutes the very nature of understanding Muslim tradition.

By making explicit connections between women's diverse experiences and the creation of inclusive epistemologies, the volume expands the horizons for communal and ritual leadership in ways that might have been previously considered unthinkable for many Muslims. The work fits squarely into the mould of a Muslim love ethics that provides new social repertoires, fresh theological insights, and vivifying ethical possibilities in response to contemporary needs. Books of this type that contribute to scholarly writing and activist arenas; that enable innovative theological and social visions which reconfigure the nature of religious authority; that render visible and models diverse subjectivities and human realities; that pivot the experiences of people residing at the margins of community into its centre; and that energise and animate expansive, inclusive, and justice-based visions of religion and tradition, provide resources of respite, rest, and resistance to many within our communities.

The second example of a contemporary Muslim love ethics that I want to invoke is an online Muslim feminist collective that I am a member of. Due to the closure of mosques during the first pandemic lockdown in April 2020, a group was started by some South African Muslim women, to perform the Friday congregational prayers. The group has since grown into a broader online feminist community which now includes women, children, some men and families from South Africa, as well as participants from other parts of the world. This collective has consciously and intentionally fostered participatory and flat leadership structures, integrating rituals and community-building through creative, inclusive, and socially engaged modes of interaction. Additionally, the group has enabled activist solidarities on social issues arising, as well as enabled collective fora for art, meditation, and other forms of creative expression within this emerging community. Members come from a wide spectrum of interests, lifestyles, age groups, gender and sexual orientations, and professional fields, and a number of congregants are offering their various talents and skills for collective learning and enrichment. Within this group, authority in ritual and knowledge is decentred. Instead, the group enables a plethora of perspectives, experiences, and personalities to have voice within the Friday congregational ritual space, as well as in broader activities undertaken. This feminist collective exemplifies a form

of loving community that addresses social and ethical challenges of the day, facilitating more expansive and imaginative spaces for Muslim women's agency and social vision, as well as enabling diverse Muslim identities to be recognised, embraced, and celebrated.

These two examples of love politics that I have discussed above, which are the first *Women's Khutbah Book* and the online Muslim feminist congregation started in South Africa, reveal emerging Muslim feminist communities which are part of a larger global movement towards gender inclusivity and social justice. Increasingly, there appears to be varying kinds of nurturing Muslim feminist collectives emerging within a variety of contexts, while online platforms have enabled wide-ranging solidarities, networks, and a cross-fertilisation of ideas globally.[16] A central resource for both resistance and rest is indeed the creation of a loving and beloved community which reconfigures power as a radiating circle of enhancement rather than premised on a hierarchical logic of domination. If we are to overcome the dominant modes of toxic masculinity in our world, we must – from diverse locations and orientations – raise prophetic voices of revolutionary love, build alternative forms of communities that reconfigure power and authority, and live our love politics in bold new ways. Without these forms of nourishment and deep connectivity, people cannot genuinely flourish individually and collectively.

I submit that it was precisely such an underlying love politics that was spiritually current for the Women's Defiance Campaign, a campaign that mobilised 20,000 South African women in 1956 to protest Apartheid pass laws, powerfully singing "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" (*God Bless Africa*), and "Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokordo" (*you strike a woman, you strike a rock*).[17] This inclusive women's collective coming from all races, religions, and class backgrounds, including Amina Cachalia and Albertina Sisulu, Rahima Moosa and Ama Naidoo, Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph,

[16] See for example the global reach of the Muslim feminist movement, *Musawah*, whose work involves feminist knowledge-building, international advocacy and capacity building of NGOs, committed to justice and equality in the Muslim family. They hosted a very successful set of webinars during the pandemic that connected Muslim feminist scholars and activists from various parts of the world with audiences, also attending from all parts of the world. See Musawah, "Knowledge Building Research Initiative: Reclaiming 'Adl and Ihsan in Muslim Marriages: Between Ethics and Law," *Musawah*, https://www.musawah.org/knowledge-building/reclaiming-adl-and-ihsan/.

[17] See Human Science Research Council, *Women marching into the 21st century: wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2000).

Fatima Meer and Sophie Williams de Bruyn, together embodied a powerful force of spirit and solidarity, embodying a love ethics that envisioned a more inclusive, just world. May we resonate the legacy of all our feminist ancestors and the prophetic revolutionaries of our time, who invite us to the highest within ourselves for the collective good.

In that spirit I would like to conclude with a poem by the inimitable Syrian feminist poet, Moha Kahf entitled, *The Mihrab of your Mind*:[18]

I'm told that we belong to different faiths
and pray at differing appointed times
to gods of different names
we find comfort in familiar forms,
and each soul melts its candle
alone in its dark night

But I know this: our bodies' shapes divine,
these columns of flesh, this warm breath
of heart talk between us,
these contain the covenant
God put at the base of Eve and Adam's spine

This is what religion is.
Its Kaba is the heart
Its prophet, savior, and messiah
is the nobler self
Its scriptures are always written
in the here and now

We are all its chosen tribe
Its miracle is joy, its fruit is gratitude
Its holiest of holies has been placed
in the living church inside my chest
in the mihrab of your mind

[18] Mohja Kahf, *The Hajar Poems* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2016), 95. A *mihrab* refers to the prayer niche at the front of a mosque which provides the direction for prayer.

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First Respondent: Fatima Seedat[1]

For Feminist Killjoys between Love and Justice: The Spiritual is Political[19]

[1]SHORT BIO
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Response

I begin with thanks to Prof Nadar and the team of people she works with for this invitation and this event. My further thanks for the opportunity to share the stage with two remarkable scholars of Islam whose ideas I respect deeply and whose courage I am drawn to regularly. As feminists, our politics should never sit too far away from our academics, and I am privileged to share this space with two souls/sisters/scholars who know how to show up, know that they must show up, and most importantly,

[19] This paper was prepared as a response to Prof Sa'diyya Shaikh's keynote address at the annual lecture, *Economies of Violence: Religion, Resistance and Rest,* hosted by Prof Sarojini Nadar, Desmond Tutu Chair for Religion and Social Justice, University of the Western Cape in August 2021.

they show up! Prof Sa'diyya Shaikh and Dr Farah Zeb, it is a privilege. Prof Sarojini Nadar and the team, my thanks for making possible a discussion among us.

Drawing on our topic "Religion, Resistance, and Rest," and in response to Prof Shaikh's presentation, I begin with a reflection on us as feminist killjoys and conclude with our work in the politics and the poetics of love, to advance from Prof Shaikh's presentation not only the idea that personal is political, but also that the spiritual is political – indeed our love is political.

I begin with the love which we give ourselves, or do not, and a quote from a dear friend and activist, Shamillah Wilson with some guidance for activists who have not yet learnt to care for themselves: "There is no competition between taking care of yourself and changing the world. Both are equally important and necessary when pursuing a life of purpose and passion."[20]

Shamillah reminds us that we know much more of the second than the first. In fact, we know so little of caring for ourselves that they say we kill joy, we "take out the fun and the life of a situation" which is why Prof Shaikh directs us to the book of Sara Ahmad, *Living a Feminist Life* where Sara reclaims our killjoy spirits with a "Killjoy Survival Kit" and a "Killjoy Manifesto."[21] In this perspective, the killjoy does not signal the end of joy but a feminist critique of "happiness," and not where happiness is the same as goodness, rather where the happiness of people rests on the inequality of others or as Sa'diyya explains above, an illusionary "happiness sustained through structural inequality." It is indeed "a moral imperative to be a killjoy in contexts of oppression," Sa'diyya reminds us. We may not stop "calling out constantly against complicity, silence, heedlessness, and illusionary constructs of peace and happiness," yet doing so is indeed "epistemically and emotionally a heavy burden."

[20] Shamillah Wilson, *Waking Up: How I woke up my Inner Activist to create a Bigger Life* (Self-published: Cape Town, 2018).

[21] Sara Ahmed, "Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness," *Signs* 35, no.3 (2010): 571-94. See also her book, Sara Ahmed, *Living a feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); also Sara Ahmed, "Selfcare as Warfare," *feministkilljoys*, 25 August 2014, https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/.

Reflecting on the emotional work and costs of feminist commitment and our inability to recognise when to rest, a phrase that first came to mind was that "there is no rest for the wicked." I went to search for the origin of this little phrase that seems to have been in my head for ever and learned very quickly that rather than a direct biblical quote, which I had long assumed it to be, it is in fact a paraphrase of Isaiah 57:21, where the actual text reads, "'There is no peace', says my God, 'for the wicked.'" In this way I learned that peace and not rest is denied to the wicked. Maybe because many of our faith traditions cast us as the wicked – by us I mean the feminists – I have somehow always identified with this idea. Maybe it is also because of what Sa'diyya calls "the intimacy between the spiritual and the political realms." I am claiming the term because we know our "wickedness" is directed against oppression. Therefore, if you are a killjoy, then indeed you know the lack of peace – mental, emotional, and oft times even physical peace – in the work we do.

While we may know little of how to rest, and we may experience little peace in our own struggles for change, transformation, and worlds without oppression, what we do know is what we want and so we dare to envision a peaceful state of living, whether in our homes as individuals, parents and partners, in our workspaces, or our social worlds. We envision a state of happiness that is not founded on inequality. Regardless of what they say, then, this bunch of *wickeds* will know peace – either here or in some other place beyond this realm. For all feminists, the personal is political, for faith-based feminists, the spiritual is political too.

We try to create this peace in the spaces we inhabit: The homes and communities we live in, in the movements we build around us because we matter. Drawing on Audrey Lourde, Sara Ahmad narrates that

> in queer, feminist and anti-racist work self-care is about the creation of community, fragile communities, assembled out of the experiences of being shattered. We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other. This is why when we have to insist, I matter, we matter, we are transforming what matters.[22]

[22] Ahmed, "Selfcare," 2014.

The value of community for feminist work is without doubt. It holds us, sustains us, and if we get it right, it also transforms us. In academic spaces this is vitally important, in spaces where we regularly encounter hierarchy as we grade our students' papers, apply for promotions, evaluate colleagues' research applications, elect to senate, and make a decision in committees, the communities of support that we gather around us can make the difference, giving us the courage to discern between decisions that maintain the *status quo* and those that transform it. Sustained, replenishing, and fulfilling work happens in community, through community, for community-building, indeed for world-building, without oppression.

However, this is hard work – and my dear Prof Sa'diyyah tells us to do this work with love. However, love is also political. Anna Jonasdottir, an Icelandic feminist of many years ago, brought us to a field called "love studies," when she enquired about how patriarchy continues in those societies "that are formally/legally equal and socioeconomically relatively gender equal."[23] The answer that Anna provides is striking: She states that it is because of love. Using ideas of "political sexuality" and "socio-sexual relationships," she offers us "a dialectical concept of love (containing both caring and erotic/ecstatic power)" as well as a theory of "love power."[24] Rather simply, she explains, "If capital is accumulated alienated labour, male authority is accumulated alienated love."[25]

You may want to read that once more because it is a profound analysis of how love functions in patriarchal societies. I am myself still learning about "love power" as a theoretical concept, but there are two spaces that are relevant for this event where I can see how the alienation of women from their love – both erotic and caring – leaves their energies and efforts unseen and produces economic precarity. Both situations bring us to a complex intersection of relations that can be understood as economies of violence, where the production and consumption, through the allocation of (scarce) resources, produce violence through the actual or threatened use of force or power to produce damage or injury.

[23] Anna Jonasdottir, "Sex/Gender, Power and Politics: Towards a Theory of the Foundations of Male Authority in the Formally Equal Society," *Acta Sociologica* 31, no.2 (1988): 167.
[24] Jonasdottir, "Sex/Gender, Power and Politics," 167.
[25] Jonasdottir, "Sex/Gender, Power and Politics," 167.

Framing intimate relationships in a theory of love makes immediately evident the economies of violence perpetuated through the exploitation of love labour, whether by women or by other people. The first refers to the Marikana massacre of 2015 where mine workers were massacred by state police in the midst of a strike against low wages, and which event first inspired these annual lectures on economies of violence, and the second speaks to marriage and what happens when the love labour in marriage is not recognised.

In the first instance, we are guided by the work of Asanda Benya[26] whose analysis illustrates all the different forms of love power of the women partners of the Marikana mine workers, which she defines as social-reproductive labour, or as the title of her article suggests, "the invisible hand." Cheap labour power, whether on the mines or anywhere else, is reproduced on a daily basis by the invisible love-based labour of countless women and others. The "social reproduction" work of the women at Marikana, whether through care in the domestic space or sexual intimacy, supported the workers in both their minework and their resistance to low wages. The symbiotic relation between the reproductive and productive spheres is a critical fault line in the Marikana crises which Asanda tells us, "collapse(s) the distinction between home and work; it was as much about the mines – the workplace – as it was about the living conditions of workers."[27] While this is not a new idea, Asanda's suggestion that this distinction collapses because men (both husbands and mine bosses) can and do claim women's love (directly or indirectly) and profit thereby (whether through patriarchy or capital), makes evident the ways in which the exploitation of love manifests in the authority of patriarchy.

The second resonance is in marriage. Last month, in August 2021, the South African Constitutional Court heard arguments about why the state has an obligation to recognise and regulate Muslim marriages, and we are waiting for that judgement which is a protracted process spanning 27 years since 1994, developing new legislation and challenging potentially unconstitutional legal practices. Muslim marriages are not legally recognised in South Africa. Yet a number of scholarly and community formations have also rejected the feminist calls for state recognition of Muslim

[26] Asanda Benya, "The Invisible hand: Women in Marikana," *Review of African Political Economy* 42, no.146 (2015): 545-60.

[27] Benya, "The Invisible hand," 557.

marriages, thus sustaining an economy of deep structural violence that operates within the framework of marital intimacies. In the absence of legal recognition for Muslim marriages, married, divorced, and widowed women may not claim any matrimonial property rights. While it is true that divorce generally impoverishes wives, especially mothers, women leaving legally unrecognised Muslim marriages, are almost always impoverished at the end of a marriage, with little to no legal protection from the South African state.

Marriage is itself an economy for the production, consumption, and exchange of resources, not only material but also intimate, erotic, and caring love among them. It is arguably this love that ensures that as wives and partners, women do not recognise or claim the full value of the energies which they expend in producing the love that makes relationships flourish. Legal systems recognise marriage not for the exchange of love, but for the entanglements of property and material assets. Depending on the chosen property regime, marriage can either empower or impoverish a wife. Following Anna Jonasdottir, when love encounters patriarchy, it is accumulated by and alienated toward the patriarchs so that wives are never acknowledged for the value of their intimacies, and love is never assigned its full value in the economy of the marriage. Material property, instead, is the basis of value and regulation in a marriage. Consequently, even where a marriage has state recognition, only these material elements are protected and regulated, not the intimate elements of a marriage. More egregiously, where there is no state recognition of marriages, even these material rights remain unprotected, with their violation related directly to the unrecognised value of the intimacies or love that form part of a marriage. We can only hope that the SA Constitutional Court will rule positively. Until then, we will be subject to the state's arguments that it is not responsible for protecting Muslim women in Muslim marriages.

Around the time of the Constitutional Court case, a document penned anonymously was circulated, arguing that "as it stands, the system in South Africa is perfectly designed to impoverish Muslim wives." The excerpts which I quote, illustrate how the absence of state recognition of a religious marriage allows for the accumulation of male authority and the alienation of women's love to collectively produce an economy of violence.

The Real Reason we don't want Legal Recognition for Muslim Marriage: "A Handy Guide from the Money-Minded Muslim Husbands Club" or "50 Steps on How to Leave a Muslim Wife Destitute."

1. Marry a woman in Islamic law/rites only.
2. If she asks for a Civil Marriage tell her it's haram, we can rely on the "shariah" to protect us.
3. If she insists on an Islamic Marriage contract, ensure its not in community of property, pretend like that's haram.
16. Make sure your wife can never have a share in any of your assets, now or in the future.
17. Remind her that to insist on having assets in her name means she's a gold digger, and you never married a gold digger.
18. Make sure you never give your wife any money that isn't for a household expense.
19. When you give your wife money for household expenses give less than she asks for so she can't save anything for herself.
34. When you divorce, rather spend money fighting your wife in court than let her share any assets you earned while married to her.
50. Again, don't be guilty, keep pretending this is what Allah wants, keep pretending you're just doing things the "shariah" way.[28]

A marriage, therefore, represented as love (in the collective of care and erotic experience), brings with it great precarity, more so when this love is not accompanied by justice. Unfortunately for wives, material capital rarely partners with justice.

However, I know Sa'diyya is talking about love of a different kind, and so to address those concerns, my questions are about how we work with love in systems that are designed to benefit from our love, but not to allow for us, the lovers, to also thrive? How do we love when the system

[28] The piece was authored anonymously and thereafter also published by an anonymous printer, who commissioned a set of illustrations for the piece and shared it on Whats-App and other social media. An early version of it is on the Muslim Personal Law Network Facebook Page, n.d., https://www.facebook.com/mplnetworkSA/.

allows our beloveds to use our backs as climbing blocks onto positions of power and then to also deny us our own power?

How do we love when our most intimate spaces are also spaces for the origin of betrayals? How do we sit between our betrayed selves and our beloved others as they transform into people who no longer see us, happy to have enriched themselves from our love and our care? Our practice as Muslim feminists has been a long training in difference and sitting within it. It is indeed difficult to "sit" in the space of deep hurt. How do we love after being left destitute after 10/20/30/40 years of marriage, committed to our family and children, or after being ignored despite all the love we gave to support the realisation of the constitutional rights to dissent and to claim a living wage? Importantly, how do we love when we do not know how not to love? Some people like to speak about a massive chasm between Islam and feminism, and indeed we must always be conscious about what we bring together when these two ways of the world are trying to converge.

Yet many of us have found ways to recognise our feminist, self-affirming selves within our original divine contract. For us the spiritual is always political. As we come to sit more and more comfortably in our feminist Muslim selves, reflecting on the deep pain that feminist work inevitably encounters, we struggle to always be strong. Recalling Shamillah Wilson's sage advice, it is not a competition between love for ourselves and our cause. Guided by the words of Matshilo Motsei, writer, healer, activist, and feminist, we do not need to be strong all the time. In the *Bosom of the Goddess*, surrounded by our own love, it is okay to break a little….

Safe in the Bosom of the Goddess
I rock like a little girl
Sucking her thumb
Nursing a bruised knee after a fall
From the Bosom of the Goddess
I wail in pain, only to
Fall into a deep slumber
That dries away my tears
Tender hands to hold me
I learn to break a little
To make room for yet
Another life experience

It is in her Bosom that I
Become an innocent child
Ready to love again without fear
As she mends my torn spirit with love
I know it will be okay.[29]

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[29] Mmatshilo Motsei, *Hearing Visions Seeing Voices* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2014), 14.

Second Respondent: Farah Zeb[1]

Spiritual Sibling Discourses[30]

[1]**SHORT BIO**
Dr Farah Zeb completed her PhD in Arab and Islamic Studies at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK in 2017. She is an Independent Scholar and Research Consultant. Her research focuses on gender, sexuality, ethics, vulnerability and social inclusion. Her broader interests encompass contemporary Islamic thought; law, politics and social policy; postcolonial studies; exclusion and inequality; community cohesion and engagement; and interfaith dialogue. Prior to academia, she was working in various capacities for both statutory and non-statutory organisations to support vulnerable members of our diverse communities – from children and young people to vulnerable adults.

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Response

Dear Professors, colleagues, and friends, it is both an intellectual and heart honour to be invited to respond to the delightfully rich keynote delivered by a uniquely enigmatic and generous intellectual scholar of religion, Professor Sa'diyya Shaikh. Permit me to begin with a note of gratitude to Professor Nadar and the entire team at the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice. My gratitude is not due to the normative formality of academic protocol, but the kind of gratitude that emerges from within one's heart, the same location from which Professor Shaikh invites us to orientate our ethical engagements, i.e., ones that are situated in reciprocity, mutuality, love, and justice, none of which can become a reality without a beating feeling heart. As scholars of religion with an attentive pulse on matters of race, class, gender, sexuality, LGBTIQ, differently abled bodies, socio-economic status, and multiple marginalities, we are alertly attuned to the daily news of racist, sexist, homophobic, and queer phobic atrocities, committed in particular upon the bodies of women and marginalised members of our communities. We are all aware that every aspect of our existence is but a moment.

[30] This paper was prepared as a response to Professor Sa'diyya Shaikh's keynote address at the annual lecture *Economies of Violence: Religion, Resistance and Rest,* hosted by Prof Sarojini Nadar, Desmond Tutu Chair for Religion and Social Justice, University of the Western Cape in August 2021.

Attentiveness to our way of being in each moment is a modality that Professor Shaikh invites us to engage with. As I respond to Professor Shaikh's intricate keynote, I am conscious of the legacy and the work of our ancestor giant Reverend Doctor Katie Cannon[31] in whose honour this year's Economies of Violence gathering has launched the special journal edition.[32] Following in the footsteps of Reverend Doctor Traci West's keynote[33] from last year, and the late Doctor Cannon's phenomenal legacy, Professor Shaikh provides us with method. Last year, Doctor West insisted on method, and this year we have method from Professor Shaikh – a methodology that I will refer to later on – methods of attentive listening and loving, of engaging with the meaning-making richness that comes from our lived experience. As such, our lived experience serves as a template for interpretative possibilities.[34] This beautifully resonates with the attentive care of Doctor Cannon's pastoral pedagogical legacy.

Professor Shaikh combines the potential of ethical horizons within the Islamic tradition without being apologetic, without being simplistically

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31 See e.g., Katie G. Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1996); Katie G. Cannon, "Womanist perspectival discourse and Cannon formation," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, no.1-2 (1993): 29-37; Katie G. Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (eds.), *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011); Katie G. Cannon, "Moral wisdom in the Black women's literary tradition," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1984): 171-92; Katie G. Cannon, "Pedagogical praxis in African American theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*, eds. Katie G. Cannon and Anthony B. Pinn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 319-30; Katie G. Cannon, "Eliminating ignorance," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no.1 (2016): 114-20.

32 Sarojini Nadar and Megan Robertson, "Recognition, Resistance and Rest: Drawing from the Womanist Wells of Katie Geneva Cannon," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021).

33 On 31 August 2020, Doctor Traci West offered her keynote speech under the theme of *Economies of Violence.* This was the fourth annual public lecture hosted by the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice in commemoration of the 1956 Women's March and 2012 Marikana Massacre: Traci West, "Economies of Violence 2020," 30 September 2020, https://desmondtutucentre-rsj.uwc.ac.za/2020/09/30/-economies-of-violence/.

34 See Professor Shaikh's seminal work on lived experience as an interpretive tool: Sa'diyya Shaikh, "A Tafsir of Praxis: Gender, Marital Violence, and Resistance in a South African Muslim Community," in *Violence Against Women in Contemporary World Religions: Roots and Cures*, edited by Dan Maguire and Sa'diyya Shaikh (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 66-89.

glorious about religion having all the answers, if only we would look deeper, or make the effort to see clearly.[35] She also does not turn away from the hard reality and concrete challenges experienced by humanity, or the wretched treatment meted out to animals, as well as the current state of our burning, parched, famished, flooded, waterlogged, chemically seeped, suffocating planet, a planet that is quite symbolically, like many of us, grasping for its own breath.

Right from the outset, Professor Shaikh categorically states her quest and invites us to reflect on how each of us might contribute to enabling collective transformations that create nourishing modes of being across the spectrum of life. In order to sustain life, she attentively invites us to bring the very best of us to the table, as well as the very best from each of our distinctive sibling traditions of belief. One might feel that this is quite a tall order that our dear Professor Shaikh is asking us to deliver, and this may well be the case for many of us. Where do we begin, or more precisely, how do we even begin to think about what segment or part of us is the best of us, worthy of being called and carried to the table of humanity, and what does that table of humanity look like for those of us who are marginalised members of our broader communities?

Living in constant states of resistance to forms of oppression and silencing is exhausting, and survival from one precarious moment to the next carries its own burdensome weight. For many of us, the question really is, Have any of us truly tasted reciprocity, tasted mutuality, tasted love, tasted justice? Have any of us tasted rest, tasted respite, tasted healing, tasted support? Without having tasted or being sufficiently nourished by such life enhancing forces, how does one even envisage flourishing?[36]

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[35] Professor Shaikh's *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy* provides a rich example of how insights rooted in tradition can prove to be a treasure trove from which a historic interpretation of key mystical texts can be reimagined, rethought, and applied to contemporary challenges in ways that are more gender inclusive and attentive to contemporary practices and sensibilities. See Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

[36] In relation to flourishing, Grace Jantzen, feminist philosopher of religion, emphasises not ignoring, denigrating, or forgetting, but instead placing an importance on one's embodied needs. See Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); also Grace M. Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence: Death and the Displacement of Beauty* (London: Routledge, 2004).

How do we even extricate what is the best of us when we are so busy surviving, working, traversing different economies of violence perpetuated upon us as women in micro and macro ways that cause exhaustion to the very core of our beings. As women and members of marginalised communities, we do not just burn one candle at both ends, we are often burning multiple candles at both ends wherever ruptures occur along the spines of our respective candles. Our work is back breaking work, and yet we are still expected to deliver on work that places bread on the table from our already precarious forms of *ad hoc* sessional piecemeal employments, and we deliver not only with our tears, sweat, and blood, but we deliver in time and on time, within suffocating systems which are barely receptive to our pulse.

Late yesterday evening, following two weeks of solid work on Muslim feminist activist initiatives in South Africa, that both Doctor Seedat and I have been immersed in, we needed to make a call about which content to include in our respective responses here today in honouring Professor Shaikh's wonderful keynote. When we find ourselves in these situations, we have to ask ourselves, What gives way and what has to give way? What is lost and what is sacrificed when we are faced with having to make these multiple calls in multiple forms, navigating the crucial timely needs of our diversely marginalised communities, with the demands and expectations placed upon us by an often toxically masculinised academy and a globally problematic political landscape?

Whilst traversing through the midst of the messiness of these landscapes, we still need to honour the work and teachings of our academic and spiritual siblings, educators, mentors, pedagogical giants, and sages across our religious traditions. Each of us must constantly, continuously, consistently, and conscientiously commit to holding ourselves to account. Holding ourselves to account is important. Many of us carry and walk with wounds of vulnerability. These same wounds are portals to deeper understanding of systemic patterns both within us and of relational ones that we encounter on a daily breath by breath basis.

As scholars and engaged grassroot academics, many of us have had to become jugglers extraordinaire. One wonders where we find time for rest because as the late Doctor Alease Brown said, "This stuff stays on the

mind and refuses to let go."[37] The exhaustion of our respective labour impacts our mental, psychological, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

As refreshing a paradigm as it can be to see rest and respite as forms of resistance, advocated by the self-ordained "Nap Bishop" Tricia Hersey,[38] how realistic is or has rest and respite been in our lives? And yet, despite our various sufferings and silencing, we continue in our concerted efforts not to reinforce exploitative modes of human engagement. Indeed, we pause, acknowledging that human dignity for all is at our core, and we pause even longer when we witness other women and marginalised members of our community being used as decoys, in patronising patriarchal metanarratives that seek to dim the spirit of one's individual and collective agency. Intimacy between spiritual modalities of being and the daily messiness of political realms of the academy and the world that surround us is not easy, and yet we must continue to ground ourselves with as much ethical attentiveness as we can reasonably muster, whilst we create paths and carve out our uniquely different ways of replacing various paradigms of dominion and domination. This is indeed a formidable task, as Professor Shaikh indicates.

Alongside the naming of specific systemic challenges, the brilliant contributions in the special addition journal[39] mentioned by Professor Nadar earlier on in this seminar, clearly and categorically calls attention to Doctor Cannon's brand of womanism, a brand that is aimed to celebrate a more holistic picture of black life, theology, and agency. Many of the contributors to the special issue speak of Doctor Cannon's lifework as

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37 Nadar and Robertson, "Recognition, Resistance and Rest," 8.

38 Nadar and Robertson, "Recognition, Resistance and Rest," 15. See also the Tricia Hersey webpage for more information on "rest is resistance" and "rest as reparations" frameworks (Tricia Hersey webpage, "About," http://www.triciahersey.com/about.html).

39 Beth Elness-Hanson, "'If You Bless the Women…:' An Intercultural Analysis of Blessings in the Book of Ruth," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 109-26; Natalie Y. Jones, "Cannon the Bear," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 127-33; Tinyiko Maluleke, "Once Upon a Time: Invoking Lore and Narrative in Memory of Katie Geneva Cannon," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 42-55; Madipoane Masenya, "Katie Geneva Cannon's Canon on Womanist Ethics: Reflections from African-South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 93-108; C.L. Nash, "'I Kicked Myself Back to Life:' Womanist Reflections on Awakening During Religio-Academic Sleep," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 34-41; Evelyn L. Parker, "Courage to Teach for Courage," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 56-73; Miranda Pillay, "The *Virtue of Unctuousness?* Toward the Moral Agency of Women in Patriarchal Normative Contexts," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 74-92.

attentive "embodied" knowledge from a contextual framework, while Doctor Fundiswa Kobo's paper reminds us of Doctor Cannon's emphasis on women's bodies as epistemological sources.[40]

The academic rigour of Professor Shaikh's work and beautiful keynote is in delightful harmony with Doctor Cannon's work. These are precious spiritual sibling discourses in which we see moments, indeed a momentum of flourishing akin to looking out of a window in early spring and seeing flowers of different hues blossoming and swaying alongside one another in the magnificence of light – a light not only towards which they themselves extend, but a light which also embraces, recognises, and receives them. Nature provides us with so many rich examples of walking with, walking with one another across our spiritual traditions, and lifting one another in light, with light.

In conclusion I want to state that the Muslim woman's *khutbah* book[41] and the inclusive collective collaborative community that Professor Shaikh references, honour spirituality in ways that women have themselves actively embodied, interpreted, and determined. They are worth celebrating to the core, and shouting out loud about, for these initiatives are powerful testaments to a flourishing of reciprocity, mutuality, love, and justice emerging from supportive communities of women's solidarity, with marginalised communities included, determined to create a narrative that honours human dignity for all, across scriptures and experience.

I thank you for the privilege of opportunity granted to me for being a respondent to this delightful keynote, to the work of such an enigmatic scholar, Professor Shaikh. Truly honoured.

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[40] Fundiswa A. Kobo, "A Womanist Excavation of Black Spirituality Trapped in the Dungeons: In Memory of Katie Geneva Cannon," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 19-33.

[41] Sa'diyya Shaikh and Fatima Seedat (eds.), *The Women's Khutbah Book: Celebrating Muslim Women's Religious Authority at the Minbar* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

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Élize Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men: Masculinities and Power in Conflict Zones.* London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018.

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SOFT COVER ISBN: 978-1-9206-2010-3

Reviewer: Selina Palm[1]

[1]**SHORT BIO**
Dr Selina Palm is a feminist scholar-activist based at the interdisciplinary Unit for Religion and Development Research at Stellenbosch University. She consults for organisations around the world to disrupt violence against women, children, and queer bodies and has worked, or provided empirical research, in over 20 countries.

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Élize Féron's concise book is an important and sobering read and includes a detailed synthesis of her empirical fieldwork in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Ireland since 2005. She shines a spotlight on a theme which frequently remains invisible or exceptionalised in global research around sexual violence, namely men as victims of sexual abuse in conflict-affected settings. Féron argues that breaking this silence is an urgent feminist task if the patriarchal roots of sexual violence by men against multiple victims are to be better understood. This call needs to be heard by all people who are working on sexual violence today. The book highlights the lived experiences of male survivors and male perpetrators in multiple settings, enabling her theoretical analysis of how violence is understood, narrated, and addressed to emerge from concrete contexts of experience.

Féron focuses on the power dynamics underlying sexual violence which often construct dominant/subordinate relations. She pays attention to how both masculine and feminine are constructed in conflict-related settings where a hyper-militarised masculinity is performed. She argues that in some settings, up to one third of all conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is against men,[1], but that this is glossed over by many

[1] Élize Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men: Masculinities and Power in Conflict Zones* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 2.

prevailing paradigms that position men only as aggressive perpetrators. She challenges this silence as myopic and incomplete. She is, however, sensitive to concerns by feminist scholars that including sexual violence against men may run the risk of making women survivors invisible, or reinscribing forms of naturalised patriarchy that regard women as more "rape-able" than men. However, she insists that if sexual violence is about power, then a broader analysis helps to "unveil the underlying structures of power"[2] and adds to the feminist task. She bridges a gap between post-structural feminism and hegemonic masculinity approaches to explore how bodies become gendered in society, through the lens of sexual violence.

At the heart of the book is a concern with "the idea that through wartime sexual violence against men in particular, social hierarchies are imposed, maintained or contested."[3] This intersectional approach relates gender norms to other dimensions of power and historical, political, and cultural contexts. Her focus on men is not about excluding boys, but exploring the meaning of violence against those publicly regarded as embodying masculinity in this setting.[4] She "understands wartime sexual violence as a gendered performance that uses patriarchal and heterosexual norms in order to enforce or enact a new power order."[5]

The book is divided into seven chapters within which Féron builds her argument around her 80 interviews with mainly male combatants across the three countries.[6] The first chapter sets out an overview of existing empirical frameworks on CRSV and its limits. The second shows how CRSV is related to power hierarchies, including gender, and founded in patriarchal assumptions.[7] Chapters 3 and 4 deep dive into the lived experiences and stories of male perpetrators and male survivors. Chapter 5 builds an argument from these diverse stories about the gendered narratives that can hinder and silence reporting this type of violence at multiple levels. Chapter 6 looks at programmes of care and

2 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 4.

3 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 6.

4 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 7.

5 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 13.

6 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 1.

7 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 14.

support and the need for both men and women to be included, whilst Chapter 7 points to a challenge around prosecuting male CRSV.
Féron first explores current framings of CRSV which she feels offer essentialised approaches to militarised masculinities, an emphasis on structural factors or a focus only on the gender transaction between male perpetrator and female victim.[8] She suggests that these leave important questions unanswered such as the nexus between sexual violence and other taxonomies of violence.[9] She argues that a new framing can also shed light on CRSV against women by exploring how the process of feminisation (of both men and women) takes place in the light of gender plasticity. Féron situates sexual violence within a gendered power structure that is tied into structures of domination between men as well as between women. By focusing on combatants – positioned as dominant and violent men – she shows how the values of the wider social gendered order are employed to feminise victims, whether they are male or female. Wartime violence against men is embedded in the patriarchal principles that underpin sexual violence against women, as "part of a repertoire of violence that simultaneously produces, and is produced, by a certain social order."[10]

Féron's situation of sexual violence within a gendered power structure is then developed further. Chapter 2 notes that when other ways to exert masculinity are lost, sexual violence can be used to reassert one's place. Sexual violence against men is often depicted as crossing new "thresholds of horror." She suggests that these have been far less theorised than that of women who are often made visible as "lust bounties" or as "weapons of war." These strategies form part of a methodology of extremes with "bodies as canvas for a message of barbaric extravagance,"[11] depicted as part of a broader strategy of brutalisation. Militarised masculinity regards men who do not fight as feminised cowards, as military values can also become part of the social fabric with sexual violence weaponised. The group bonding aspect of sexual violence frequently shapes young male combatants who want to belong, while women soldiers can also participate in this to prove their "masculinity" and toughness. To rape is considered a male pursuit, but to be

8 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 19.
9 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 20.
10 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 39.
11 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 49.

raped is regarded as being feminised. Féron notes that international actors can also use modes of domination in their torture methods and colonising power relations[12] with narratives around local sexual violence even used to justify Western intervention.[13]

Féron's book goes beyond common media stereotypes to explore the complex motivators and benefits for perpetrators of forms of sexual violence. Her male survivor interviews delve into the political meaning of the sexual torture of men in places like Ireland, as well as ways in which the sexual shame and feminisation of men also reverberates onto their families.[14] Male survivors who are forced to "perform as women" in sexual and social roles (such as bush wives) can struggle long term with a loss of "male" social status[15] and can remain in limbo, with their health needs ignored by doctors or by demobilisation processes.[16] Féron points to the misleading nature of a discourse of exceptionality often used around same-gender sexual violence. She also raises the question of women perpetrators, a phenomenon occurring especially in the Eastern DRC.[17] She refutes a heteronormative frame on rape to argue that male CRSV is often desexualised and male bodies degendered by using terms such as "torture" or "treated as a woman," rather than recognising this as rape[18] and also by searching for political (rather than sexual) motives.[19] While women's limited visibility in international politics is often mainly around sexual violence, men, who are more visible overall, remain invisible on this issue, suggesting a shared refusal to see male sexual vulnerability.[20]

Féron's final chapters warn against a gender-exclusive approach to CRSV that reinforces a male perpetrator/female victim binary and makes sexual violence against men invisible.[21] This has practical implications

12 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 55.
13 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 58.
14 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 102.
15 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 114.
16 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 113.
17 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 123.
18 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 118.
19 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 125.
20 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 129.
21 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 133.

both for survivor support services, which often only target women, and for prosecution of perpetrators. Men survivors, like women, face fear and shame, but also further disbelief, with a common conflation of male rape with homosexuality. Féron notes that three quarters of the world's population live in countries that only recognise female rape.[22] She links CRSV for perpetrators and victims to larger political and military strategies, embedded in a patriarchal heteronormative discourse,[23] and calls for change in how CRSV is framed and understood.[24] She argues that sustainable prevention requires a three-tier approach to address individual perpetrators, group accountability, and military culture change. Féron is aware that this could turn the attention away from female survivors, giving "male survivors an entry card into the business."[25] However, her core claim is that to focus only on sexual violence against women, re-biologises them and fails to regard men as having vulnerable sexual bodies. She concludes: *'The fact that wartime sexual violence against men hasn't received much attention yet means that a certain vison of masculinity as invulnerable and as the backbone of the national, ethnic or religious group can be preserved…the hypervisibility of the sexual brutalisation of women vs the silencing of the sexual brutalisation of men are two sides of the same patriarchal and heteronormative coin. Unveiling and highlighting this is a major feminist task*."[26]

This book stimulates critical engagement by showing how silence on this matter is anti-feminist. It offers a nuanced theoretical framework rooted in lived experiences. As an empirical researcher in the South on sexual violence in conflict-affected zones, I strongly commend it as a difficult but necessary read for all researchers concerned with super-subordination structures of power that shape how masculinity is constructed and sexually performed in violent ways on the bodies of women and men.

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22 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 160.

23 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 173.

24 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 173.

25 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 93.

26 Féron, *Wartime Sexual Violence Against Men*, 175 (emphasis added).

Chammah J. Kaunda (ed.), *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: "Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*."

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Pages: 415
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Moral discourses pertaining to gender and sexuality in Africa are certainly shaped by various religious norms and cultural beliefs, and for more than a decade, Pentecostalism has emerged as a primary area of research focus on this subject.[1] The particular book under review fits within the ever-expanding body of literature on the intersections between African Pentecostalism, gender, and sexuality. The introductory chapter by Chammah J. Kaunda and Sokfa F. John centres Pentecostal and Charismatic spirituality as the lifeblood that sustains "beliefs, attitudes, moralities and legalities surrounding sexualities in Africa today."[2]

[1] See Adriaan van Klinken, "Homosexuality, politics and Pentecostal nationalism in Zambia," *Studies in World Christianity* 20, no.3 (2014): 259-81; Marian Burchardt, "Challenging Pentecostal moralism: Erotic geographies, religion and sexual practices among township youth in Cape Town," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 13, no.6 (2011): 669-83; Barbara Bompani and S. Terreni Brown, "A 'religious revolution?' Print media, sexuality, and religious discourse in Uganda," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, no.1 (2015): 110-26; Sarojini Nadar and Johnathan Jodamus, "'Sanctifying Sex:' Exploring 'Indecent' Sexual Imagery in Pentecostal Liturgical Practices," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 32, no.1 (2019): 1-20.

[2] Chammah J. Kaunda and Sokfa F. John, "Introduction: African Pentecostalism, Genders, Sexualities and Spirituality," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 2.

Included in this introduction, is a helpful overview of the book on pages 11 to 16, which sets the stage for the various essays that follow.

The title of this book immediately evokes a sense of plurality, indicative of the vastness of scholarly work on the subject matter with the concepts "genders," "sexualities," and "spiritualities" rendered in the plural, and then with an interesting location for this study, namely "African Pentecostalism." My interests were sparked by the two areas of focus: The body and the Bible, as reflected in the subtitle, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." My own work at the intersections of the biblical New Testament and gender studies over the last decade and a half has focused on the multiple ways in which biblical texts, particularly the Pauline Letters regulate bodies and praxis, both ancient and contemporary.[3] The subtitle of the book is taken from Paul's letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:19. Paul and his writings have continued to regulate norms for daily living,[4] not least gender and sexuality. His writings have, of course come under much needed gender-critical critique and scrutiny by biblical and gender studies scholars alike.[5]

From the outset and by only reading the cover and title of this book, I was already intrigued by what was on offer, given my research interests. So, while I offer some reflections on the essays in general, in the latter part of this review I will focus specifically on the ways in which the Bible is engaged by the authors in this volume.

In the introduction to the book, Kaunda, the editor and one of the contributors, Sokfa John state that "[t]he aim of this volume is to examine some of the perspectives and practices around sexualities found in African Pentecostalism."[6] The two forewords in the book focus their

[3] Johnathan Jodamus, "Gendered Ideology and Power in 1 Corinthians," *Journal of Early Christian History* 6, no.1 (2016): 1-30; Johnathan Jodamus, "Paul, the 'Real' Man: Constructions and Representations of Masculinity in 1 Corinthians," *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 23, no.2 (2017): 68-94.

[4] See Gillian Townsley, *The Straight Mind in Corinth: Queer Readings Across 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017); Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[5] Johnathan Jodamus, "Muted scholarship in 1 Corinthians: A gender-critical enquiry," *Scriptura* 118 (2019): 1-19.

[6] Chammah and John, "Introduction," 2.

attention on this aim, each tending to promise different things. The foreword by Madipoane Masenya[7] claims that the essays in the first part

> call for the affirmation of sexuality within the church and public spaces; challenge the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinities; critique gender-based violence perpetuated through the use of the Bible and African traditions and cultures; question the problematic position of the African Pentecostal-Charismatic church as a guardian of national morality, among others.

She also summarises the second part well, as focusing "on the theme of marriage, family and singleness exploring the approaches Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians use to legitimate and promote sexuality expressed in the context of heterosexual marriage."[8] Finally, she suggests that in the last section of the book "the authors challenge current normative perspectives within African Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality, by exposing the readers to non-normative and non-conforming traditions, genders and sexualities."[9]

Where is the body?

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu,[10] in the second foreword, goes beyond the confines of a foreword, and offers a deep philosophical and theological analysis of the various effects of the spirit/body split within traditional Pentecostal "religion" as he terms it. He even titles his reflections in the foreword, "Of the Human Body and Spirit/Spirits in the Study of Pentecostal Religion."[11] He admits that he chose not to comment on the essays themselves but instead to comment on the subtitle of the book, which seemingly draws from an essay that he had written a decade prior. His deep and insightful reflections could have constituted an essay in its own right in the book, rather than a foreword, and caused me to wonder whether the liberty that he took in meandering down the path of embodiment reflections, was not his way of pointing to the paucity of any

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7 Madipoane Masenya, "Foreword," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), v-vi.

8 Masenya, "Foreword," v.

9 Masenya, "Foreword," v.

10 Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Foreword," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,*'* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), vii-xi.

11 Asamoah-Gyadu, "Foreword," vii.

critical or meaningful engagement with the theme of embodiment which the subtitle of the book, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" seems to promise, but not delivers on. This then begs the question, To what extent is the stated objective "to broaden current considerations on religion and sexualities with a focus on Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in various parts of the continent,"[12] met by the 22 essays offered in this book?

What about the Bible?

The essays certainly broaden current considerations on religion and gender,[13] but I would argue that in as far as the contributions on sexualities are concerned,[14] many essays, while providing new material from specific case studies, have neglected to provide an incisive analysis or new theoretical accounts of the data that are presented. As a result, the theoretical and methodological framings of the essays are slightly deficient and perhaps even flawed. This is particularly the case with the essays that focus on biblical themes and analysis, where sweeping generalisations of biblical texts are made, with little consideration for

12 Chammah and John, "Introduction," 2.

13 See Rosinah M. Gabaitse, "Pentecostalism and the Construction of Masculinities," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 67-80; Sonene Nyawo, "Interaction Between Societal Constructions on Women Fertility and African Pentecostalism: A Seedbed for Gender-Based Violence in Swaziland," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 81-99; Jackie Mapulanga-Hulston and Maureen M. Chikoya, "Zambian Pentecostalism, Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights of Victims," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 101-17.

14 See Lovemore Togarasei, "Problematizing the Use of the Bible in the Human Sexuality and Pentecostal Spirituality Debate," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 19-34; Tapiwa P. Mapuranga, "Moving Forward in Reverse Gear? Sexuality, Dress and Public Spaces in Harare," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 35-49; Molly Manyonganise, "Publicizing the 'Private:' New Pentecostal Movements in Zimbabwe and the Discourses on Sexuality," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 51-65; Mutale M. Kaunda and Josephine Y. Towani, "An Appraisal of Pentecostal Children's Understanding of Sex and Sexuality," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 193-212.

contextual (ancient and contemporary), theoretical, and methodological rigour, or the vast theoretical innovations on gender, sex, and sexuality. While each of the essays which focus on the Bible, follows the observation that David Ngong makes in his essay about the relationship that Pentecostals have with the "Bible as the Word of God that should be followed rather than interpreted,"[15] the critique of such beliefs is not followed through with scholarly alternatives or deep and sustained hermeneutical work. Instead, authors such as Togarasei invoke contentious understandings of *the* biblical position[16] as if it is something nicely packaged and in-tact, transcultural, and not limited to idiosyncratic and nuanced ancient settings.[17] This position is also echoed by other scholars who tend to draw on the Bible in almost "proof-texting" ways, re-inscribing the very positions that they are critiquing in terms of Pentecostal over-reliance on the Bible.[18] While some of the contributors do an adequate review of how key biblical texts are used in different contexts by Pentecostal Christians, even commendably dialoguing with matters of gender and sexuality, a more thorough engagement with gender theories (rather than superficial engagements) would have provided the necessary impetus that is somewhat lacking and would have acted as a bridge between the ancient texts and the ways in which contemporary Pentecostal churches and society regulate sexualities.

What about the Plurality of Pentecostalisms and Africas?

As already noted, following from the important work done by scholars such as Sylvia Tamale,[19] an important contribution that the book makes,

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15 David T. Ngong, "The Ideal Does Not Exist on Earth: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in African Pentecostalism," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 163.

16 See Togarasei, "Problematizing the Use of the Bible," 21.

17 See Togarasei, "Problematizing the Use of the Bible," 19-34.

18 See, for example: Mapuranga, "Moving Forward," 35-49; Gabaitse, "Pentecostalism and the Construction of Masculinities," 67-80; Sonene Nyawo, "Interaction Between Societal Constructions," 81-99; Chammah J. Kaunda, Nelly Mwale, Joseph Chita, and Mutale M. Kaunda, "'Clean the Nation Spiritually:' The Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs (MNGRA) and the National Sexual Moral Order in Zambia," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 131.

19 Sylvia Tamale notes that "African religious and cultural plurality spawns many contradictions and some absurdities. So one can only imagine the complexity involved

is to foreground the multiple perspectives on the discourse around gender, spirituality, and sexuality by intentionally rendering these terms in the plural – genders, sexualities, and spiritualities. Plurality is therefore a hallmark of the collection, but it seems that this consideration did not extend to Africa and Pentecostalism which remains largely singular and unnuanced, except by the case studies which are localised in context. This left me slightly uncomfortable as I read through many of the essays which seem to make sweeping generalisations about "African culture" and also rely heavily on binary constructions of a "West" or "Global North" that is largely unconcerned with matters of the Spirit, or even a "West" that is seemingly more progressive with regard to gender and sexuality.[20] This overreliance on binary constructions tended to undo the nuance and the scholarly refinement that was seemingly being called upon by the pluralising of the terms in the title. Africa, the "colossal continent" often gets lost in stereotyping through singular and stagnant constructions. The same is true for Pentecostalism, where the distinctions between classical and contemporary forms of Pentecostalism are blurred through the collapsing of definitions under the umbrella of shared pneumatological visions. This course reductionism proposed in the introduction seems to unfortunately find its way into many of the essays too.[21]

It is regrettable that, despite the claim in the introduction by Kaunda and John that they were also working with Wariboko's nuanced definition of African Pentecostalism, that this does not come through in many of the essays.[22] Nimi Wariboko's delineation of African Pentecostalism could have assisted many of the authors to add more depth to the characterisation of their case studies as well as the literature within which they were framing their discussions:

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in exploring varied African sexualities within such shifting paradigms and crosscurrents of discourses" (Sylvia Tamale, "Exploring the contours of African sexualities: Religion, law and power," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14, no.1 [2014], 151).

20 See the essays by Tapiwa P. Mapuranga, "Moving Forward," 48; Molly Manyonganise, "Publicizing the 'Private,'" 54; Chammah J. Kaunda *et al*., "'Clean the Nation Spiritually,'" 124.

21 Chammah and John, "Introduction," 4; Molly Manyonganise, "Publicizing the 'Private,'" 57; Rosinah M. Gabaitse, "A New Man in Christ?:" Pentecostalism and the Construction of Masculinities," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 67; Sonene Nyawo, "Interaction Between Societal Constructions," 87; Mapulanga-Hulston and Chikoya, "Zambian Pentecostalism," 104; Ngong, "The Ideal Does Not Exist on Earth," 151.

22 Chammah and John, "Introduction," 3.

> African Pentecostalism is an assemblage of practices, ideas, and theologies – and interpretations of reality – whose tangled roots burrow deep into the three segments of African temporality…the "spirit" of African Pentecostalism does not signify a distilled essence, changeless core, irreducible substrate, or perfection of being but is deployed for the sake of highlighting specific observations, contemplations, and questions that point to something of broader significance for understanding the multidirectional openness of African Pentecostal social life without presuming a constrictive universalizing framework.[23]

While many of the essays in the book have not exactly succeeded in avoiding a "constrictive universalizing framework," Kaunda has succeeded in bringing together a range of voices, representing varying academic levels including early career researchers and established academics hailing from nine African countries – Ghana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Congo, and Swaziland, as well as one contribution from Australia, representing Oceania and another from Alabama, representing North America. The newer voices offering refreshing new and eager perspectives, are sometimes unfortunately obscured through inadequate theoretical and methodological rigour and poor scholarly register. That being said, the more established scholars such as Asonzeh Ukah offer a deep and insightful analysis that brings much needed scholarly innovation and balance to some of the reflections by early-career scholars who tend to eagerly reach for critique while neglecting thick description.

Overall, notwithstanding the limitations of the volume, it was most refreshing to have a book that is shifting the paradigms of research on Pentecostalism in Africa and that is drawing on insider perspectives, rather than the often-unacknowledged colonial gazes that characterise much of the global Pentecostal studies. The Andersons and Hollenwegers[24] – arguably the doyens of research on Pentecostalism – will

[23] Chammah and John, "Introduction," 4.

[24] Isaac K. Mbabazi, "Congolese Pentecostalism, Gender and Sexual Orientation," in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: 'Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*,' ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 358, n.47.

have to reckon and engage with the material provided here by those on the continent.

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