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Feminist Research into Gendered Violence: Developing PhotoVOICE 2.0 in Zambia as a Participatory Arts-based Research Method

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SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

Researching violence, especially within homes, families or closed community spaces, is often challenging. PhotoVOICE 2.0 is an innovative technology-assisted adaptation of the participatory arts-based research (PABR) method, Photovoice. It was developed and piloted in 2018 by the authors to conduct research on the ways the Anglican Mothers' Union in Zambia contributes to and/or resists violence against women and violence against children. This article discusses the methodological underpinnings and origins of this method and offers an overview of its implementation in Zambia. Several key insights emerge regarding how PhotoVOICE 2.0 enables feminist, participatory arts-based research, including that it empowers local community co-researchers and amplifies the voices of insiders to the specific institution being researched in ways that can support feminist research aims for social transformation. The technological component of the method centers PABR methods throughout the whole research process. The article concludes by emphasizing the extraordinary disruptive power of the PhotoVOICE 2.0 method in subverting existing hierarchies of knowledge and control and highlighting its continued evolution in new settings.

KEYWORDS
Photovoice; participatory arts-based research; violence against women; violence against children; feminist methodologies; Zambia

Introduction

Researching violence, especially within homes, families or closed community spaces, is very challenging. This is particularly true where

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religious or cultural practices may feature strongly as a driver of violence, or where some forms of violence may be normalized or even legitimated.[1] The research process itself can also raise additional challenges with complex power hierarchies impacting who and what is being represented and by whom. Using creative research methodologies may be essential for a more nuanced understanding of endemic forms of violence that often have hidden dimensions within families and homes, such as violence against women and violence against children. Participatory arts-based research (PABR) offers opportunities to sensitively engage with complexities that drive these patterns of violence whilst simultaneously subverting patterns of knowledge creation that exclude certain voices and experiences.

PABR is a rapidly growing methodological genre and is viewed as particularly relevant for engaging marginalized groups and researching sensitive and complex issues of gender, violence, and abuse.[2] PABR adapts key tenets of the creative arts for social research to make it publicly accessible, evocative, and engaging.[3] This article discusses an innovative, technology-assisted adaptation of a specific form of PABR: Photovoice.[4] This adaptation, which we refer to as PhotoVOICE 2.0, is a PABR method that has the potential to contribute to the field of feminist research as it utilizes technology to disrupt power hierarchies, enables multi-vocal storytelling, and centers individuals and groups whose knowledge, feelings, and experiences may have been excluded from, or devalued within, traditional research methods.[5]

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1 Elisabet le Roux and Sandra Iman Pertek, *On the Significance of Religion in Violence Against Women and Girls* (London: Routledge, 2023); Selina Palm, "Seen but not heard? Engaging the mechanisms of faith to end violence against children," in *Childhood Vulnerabilities in South Africa: Some Ethical Perspectives*, eds. Chris Jones and Jan Grobbelaar (AOSIS. South Africa, 2020), 33–64.

2 Nicole Westmarland and Hannah Bows, *Researching Gender, Violence and Abuse. Theory, Methods and Action* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

3 Gioia Chilton and Patricia Leavy, "Arts-based Research Practice: Merging Social Research and the Creative Arts," in The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research, ed. Patricia Leavy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 601–632.

4 Caroline Wang and Mary-Ann Burris. "Photovoice: Concept, Methodology and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment," Health Education and Behaviour 24, no. 3 (1997): 369–387.

5 Julia E Morris, and Lisa F Paris. "Rethinking arts-based research methods in education: enhanced participant engagement processes to increase research credibility and

PhotoVOICE 2.0 was developed and piloted in 2018 by two lead researchers (the authors of this article) following an invitation from an African women's movement and an international faith-based relief and development agency to conduct research on the ways the Anglican Mothers' Union in Zambia (MUZ) contributes to and/or resists violence against women and violence against children. Violence against women and against children remains endemic within the Zambian context, where research from 2015 found that 47% of ever-married women between the ages of 15 and 49 reported having experienced physical, sexual, and/or emotional violence from their current or most recent husband/partner, with 31% reporting having experienced such violence within the preceding 12 months.[6] In the 2014 Zambia Violence against Children Survey, nearly half of both female and male respondents reported having experienced at least one type of violence (physical, sexual or emotional) during their childhood.[7] In light of this, more attention is being paid to the underlying structures and social norms that are seen to be fueling these abuses. Specifically, the patriarchy has been identified as a driver, shaping how power is understood and distributed, particularly at the household level and within families.[8] While many intervention programs focus on transforming masculinities, less attention has been paid to the roles of women and women-led organizations.[9] Indeed, in Zambia an estimated

knowledge translation," International Journal of Research & Method in Education 45, no.1 (2022): 99–112.

6 Central Statistical Office Zambia, Ministry of Health Zambia, & ICF International. Zambia Demographic and Health Survey 2013–14. (Rockville, Maryland, USA: Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Health, and ICF International), 2014.

7 Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, University of Zambia, United Nations Children's Fund, Save the Children International, United States, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Violence against Children in Zambia: Findings from a national survey, 2014. (Lusaka, Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, 2014).

8 Cheryl Buckley, "Made in patriarchy: Toward a feminist analysis of women and design," Design Issues, 3 no 2 (1986): 3–14; Sylvia Walby, Theorizing Patriarchy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

9 Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with patriarchy," Gender and Society 2, no 3 (1988):274–290; Sarojini Nadar, and Cheryl Potgieter, "Living It Out. Liberated Through Submission? The Worthy Woman's Conference as a Case Study of Formenism," Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 26 (2010):141-151; Salvador A Macule, and Sarojini Nadar, "Women oppressing women: The cultivation of Espris de Corps in Xirilo (Women's Association) of the UCCSA in Mozambique," The Ecumenical Review 64, no. 3 (2012): 357–365.

95.5% of the population identify as Christian,[10] explaining why religious women's organizations hold significant power and influence across rural and urban areas.

The authors, both feminist researchers based at a research unit at a Global South university, were able to benefit from a close practitioner-academic partnership to develop and pilot this innovative method that allowed for qualitative research on highly sensitive issues to be carried out within a relatively closed religious space. This article describes and discusses PhotoVOICE 2.0, drawing on the pilot study conducted in Zambia to illustrate the method and process and offer some insights and lessons learned from using it there. This PhotoVOICE 2.0 method has continued to evolve and has since been used by the lead researchers in two South African university contexts to explore different forms of gendered violence. For the purposes of this article, however, the focus will be on the initial development of this method within a Zambian setting to explore complex, hidden questions of gendered violence.

Using participatory arts-based methods in feminist research

Feminist research frameworks focus on the reality of women's oppression, providing an awareness that the personal is political and an explicitly conscious challenge of gender inequalities.[11] Feminist research has political commitments (to gender equality), substantive commitments (to make gender a key focus of analysis), but also methodological commitments that seek to describe the world in ways that accurately reflect women's experiences and identify the fundamental social transformations necessary for full equality between the sexes.[12] How these commitments are applied in practice within feminist empirical research is an ongoing conversation to which this article contributes. Feminist frameworks also pay close attention

10 US Department of State. 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Zambia. [Online report]: https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/zambia/.

11 Westmarland and Bows, "Researching Gender", 10.

12 Westmarland and Bows, "Researching Gender", 11.

to intersectional realities that recognize that women are not a homogenous group, and that their lived experiences, voices, and needs are simultaneously shaped by a range of other factors such as, religion, age, social location, literacy, etc. This requires a multi-vocal approach that ensures women's diverse experiences be built into the research design.[13] Eight principles have been identified by scholars that shape contemporary feminist research on gender, violence, and abuse:[14] addressing power imbalances; expanding the questions asked; listening to women's voices and experiences; incorporating diversity and intersectionality; conducting interdisciplinary and mixed-methods research; being reflexive; building social relationships in the research process; and using research results for social transformation. While a detailed reflection on these principles is beyond the scope of this article, they have underpinned the development of the PhotoVOICE 2.0 method being explored here.

PABR[15] has been defined broadly as an approach where people collaborate with researchers in arts-making as a way of knowing.[16] It combines the key tenets of participatory action research around democratizing research processes and orienting them towards social change with the use of arts-forms as methodological tools in all, or part of, the research process. It offers a unique constellation of participation, art, and research that can help to amplify marginalized voices and experiences, improve accessibility to non-academic audiences, and communicate more sensuous, embodied, and affective ways of knowing.[17] The specific value of PABR across many stages of the community-based research process with vulnerable populations has been noted where "(a)rt forms […are…] essential to the research process

13 Seppälä, T. Melanie Sarantou, M, Miettinen, S. (eds) Arts-Based Methods for Decolonising Participatory Research. (New York. Routledge, 2021).

14 Westmarland and Bows, "Researching Gender", 12.

15 Different scholars refer to a range of terms, including arts-based methods, participatory research, arts-based research, and participatory arts-based methods. For this article, the term participatory arts-based research is used as it best describes the aims of the PhotoVOICE 2.0 methodology whilst recognising that participatory research and arts-based research, though developing in overlapping and parallel ways, should not be automatically conflated (See Westmarland and Bows, "Researching Gender"; Seppälä et al., "Arts Based Methods").

16 Caitlin Nunn, "The participatory arts-based research project as an exceptional sphere of belonging," Qualitative Research 22, no. 2 (2020): 251.

17 Nunn, "Participatory Arts-Based," 266.

itself and central in formulating the research question, generating data, analyzing data, and presenting the research results".[18] Within decolonial and feminist research frameworks, PABR is receiving increased attention and can be used alongside traditional qualitative methods to deepen research awareness of ambiguities and complexities.[19]

PABR includes many diverse forms of creative arts, including literary, audio, audio visual, multi-media, performative, and storytelling. It may also include dance, games, songs, photography, collages, and journaling techniques.[20] Visual methods have received the most attention to date, but PABR covers a wide range of creative arts. These forms, especially when participant-generated, offer increased autonomy and agency to express concepts, feelings, and ideas. They often involve a transference of narrative authority in ways that amplify the voices of previously silenced people within their own environments and engage with artefacts and symbols that have powerful meanings within their informal cultural frameworks. For example, PABR has previously been used to reclaim indigenous communal frameworks of knowing that have historically been dismissed by Western academic hierarchies of knowledge.[21] The evolving role of technology in PABR has also been identified as an important area for further development.[22]

Existing literature highlights that PABR has a number of strengths that can be well-utilized within a feminist research framework to explore sensitive issues around gender, violence, and abuse.[23] First, PABR has the transformative potential to "challenge dominant representations and ways of

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18 D Austin and Michelle Forinash, "Arts-based inquiry." In Music Therapy Research, ed. B Wheller (Gilsum NH: Barcelona Publishers), 458–471.

19 Westmarland and Bows, "Researching Gender," 88; Seppälä et al., "Arts Based Research", Morris and Paris, "Rethinking Arts," 91.

20 Seppälä et al., "Arts Based Methods"; Chilton and Leavy, "Merging Social Research", 601.

21 Seppälä et al., "Arts-Based Methods".

22 Westmarland and Bows, "Researching Gender," 152.

23 Westmarland and Bows "Researching Gender," 88–101; Sian N Thomas, Sanne Weber, and Caroline Bradbury-Jones. "Using Participatory and Creative Methods to Research Gender-Based Violence in the Global South and With Indigenous Communities: Findings from a Scoping Review." Trauma, Violence, and Abuse 23, no. 2 (2022): 342–55; Linda J Beckman, "Training feminist research methodology: doing research on the margins." Women and Therapy 37, no.1-2 (2014): 164–77.

knowing, to facilitate dialogue across ideological and epistemological boundaries, and to change hearts and minds through building intellectual and affective understanding".[24] This efficacy and emphasis on changing hearts and minds through facilitating creative dialogue can be vital for translating and disseminating challenging knowledge and lived experiences for broader audiences through embodied experiences that can generate ongoing effects.[25] This can be particularly important when what is being studied is complex, experiential, and not easily expressed in writing. The arts help depict multiple representations and symbols that are familiar to, and can be understood by, wider audiences and can create ongoing dialogue between researchers and audiences. Participants' voices also resonate more directly in the final research products due to the iterative and participatory nature of the research design.[26] Timely dissemination of research findings to benefit the communities and the people that produced them form part of PABR, as well as using creative formats to reach the right people and make longer-term contributions to policy development and social transformation.[27]

Second, PABR empowers and offers skills development to marginalized or devalued groups who are trained as community co-researchers, as well as fostering wider social connections, and improving the recognition of their ideas and experiences. It can offer cathartic tools for exploration of, and reflection on, their emotions and lived experiences, knowledge that has often been dismissed.[28] This counters wider challenges within qualitative research where participants may pretend to outsiders that there are no problems.[29] Instead, complex and ambiguous challenges can be communicated in nuanced and creative ways that surface insider knowledge and insights from lived experience throughout the research process.

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24 Nunn, "Sphere of Belonging," 254.

25 Morris and Paris, "Rethinking Arts,'' 99.

26 Lee-Ann Fenge. "Using Participatory Arts-Based Approaches to Promote Inclusive Research," in Handbook of Social Inclusion, eds. P Liamputtong, (Springer, Chambers, 2021), 511–26.

27 Westmarland & Bows, "Researching Gender," 97.

28 Nicole Brown, "Scope and continuum of participatory research." International Journal of Research & Method in Education 45, no. 2 (2022):200–11.

29 Nicole Bergen & Ronald Labonté. "Everything Is Perfect, and We Have No Problems: Detecting and Limiting Social Desirability Bias in Qualitative Research," Qualitative Health Research 30, no. 5 (2020):783–92.

Third, PABR deepens the critical and disruptive aims of feminist research founded on radical political statements about social justice and control over the production and political dissemination of knowledge.[30] PABR helps concretize these aims in practice by reducing power differentials and calling for social action. This holds important decolonizing power for wider participatory research by subverting what is viewed as academic knowledge and addressing the concerns that many conventional methods of research are unduly power-laden.[31] This disruption of the knowledge creation processes places participants and their lived contexts at the center of the research process, instead supporting their perspectives, feelings, and interests. Enabling participants and researchers to think, learn, engage, and express differently together fosters mutual respect and agency, as well as developing critical awareness, linkages, and reciprocity within participating communities in a process of collective creation. Sharing, learning, and doing together then become ways to foster plural voices, amplify unspoken histories, and help reverse power hierarchies.[32]

Fourth, PABR can be part of a feminist framing of gender, violence, and abuse, specifically to increase collaboration with those most directly affected by these sensitive issues, and help access knowledge and feelings that are not easily expressed in words.[33] This supports research participants to assert and maintain ownership over their own knowledge that can become a source of power to effect social change.[34] It is particularly relevant to researching gender-based violence (GBV) in the Global South where historical and continuing gendered and racialized inequalities of power can further marginalize GBV survivors and communities. Specific PABR methods, such as Photovoice, have been identified as having the potential to enable survivors of GBV to "transgress the violence" and reclaim their experiences.[35] Photovoice is one method that has been identified as especially suitable for feminist research that is focused on social change. It

30 Brown, "Scope," 200; Beckman, "Training feminist research methodology", 164.
31 Seppälä et al., "Arts-Based Methods," 11.
32 Seppälä et al., "Arts-Based Methods," 11.
33 Westmarland and Bows, "Researching Gender," 88.
34 Thomas et al., "Creative Methods to Research Gender-Based Violence," 488.
35 Thomas et al., "Creative Methods to Research Gender-Based Violence," 488.

is to this specific method and its innovative adaptation into PhotoVOICE 2.0 that this article now turns.

The origins of PhotoVOICE 2.0

Photovoice is a PABR method that was designed by Caroline Wang and Mary Anne Burris in the 1990s as a process through which people identify, represent, and enhance their communities. By using cameras, Photovoice enabled people to record and reflect on their community's strengths and concerns, promoting dialogue and shared knowledge about community issues through group discussions on the photos, as well reaching and influencing policymakers.[36] Since Wang and Burris's first use of Photovoice to conduct a participatory needs assessment, the methodology has been used in many different ways, such as exploring experiences of chronic pain in older adults,[37] as part of community-based participatory research with a First Nation,[38] and to help understand youth violence.[39] It has also continued to evolve in a range of different ways[40] with Photovoice being increasingly recognized as an important participatory research method.[41]

36 Caroline Wang and Mary-Ann Burris, "Photovoice: Concept, Methodology and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment," Health Education and Behaviour 24 (3) (1997): 369–387.

37 Tamara Baker and Caroline Wang, "Photovoice: Use of a Participatory Action Research Method to Explore the Chronic Pain Experience in Older Adults," Qualitative Health Research 16, no.10 (2006):1405–413.

38 Heather Castleden, Theresa Garvin,Huu-ay-aht First Nation. "Modifying Photovoice for community-based participatory Indigenous research," Social Science & Medicine 66 (2008):1393–405.

39 Jill Chonody, Barbara Ferman, Jill Amitrani-Welsh, and Travis Martin. "Violence through the eyes of youth: a photovoice exploration," Journal of Community Psychology 41, no.1 (2013):84-101.

40 Nadi Suprapto, Titi Candra Sunarti, Suliyanah Suliyanah, Desi Wulandari, Hasan Nuurul Hidayaatullaah, Alif Syaiful Adam and Husni Mubarok. "A systematic review of photovoice as participatory action research strategies," International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education 9 no.3 (2020): 675–83.

41 Kirsten Budig Julia Diez, Paloma Conde, Marta Sastre, Mariano Hernán and Manuel Franco. "Photovoice and empowerment: evaluating the transformative potential of a participatory action research project," BMC Public Health 18 (2018): 432.

In 2018, the lead researchers were invited by *Speak One Voice*[42] and *Episcopal Relief and Development*[43] to conduct in-depth research into ways that the Anglican Mothers' Union in Zambia (MUZ) contributes to and/or resists violence against women and violence against children. Responding to the sensitivity of the issues being studied, but also conscious of the power dynamics of researchers coming from outside the country, the lead researchers decided to use a PABR method that would enable insiders within the institution to play a key role as co-researchers. This resulted in the development of an adaptation of Photovoice as the central method used in the qualitative approach that followed. The adaptations made by the lead researchers to the original Photovoice focused on enabling and amplifying the multiple voices of the community co-researchers, who were ordinary members of the MUZ, and supporting them over time to deepen their ability to directly and critically reflect on the institution to which they belong. Key changes to the original Photovoice included the use of smartphones, the sharing of photos and oral voice notes in real time using WhatsApp, a lengthier data collection period situated within three different communities, and the involvement of a small group of women throughout the process as community co-researchers[44] who both collected *and* analyzed that data. This adapted form was named PhotoVOICE 2.0.

As explained earlier, this paper uses the Zambian pilot of PhotoVOICE 2.0 to explain and illustrate the uses and usefulness of this method from the perspective of the two lead researchers. Some brief background information on the pilot study is offered here to provide context. The Mothers' Union was

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42 Speak One Voice is a women-led movement that started in Zambia and Burundi to engage the church and women at grassroots level in ending violence against women and children. It envisions harmonious, safe, and healthy families and communities where men and women respect one another as equally valuable with relationships based on biblical principles of justice and love.

43 Episcopal Relief and Development is a faith-based international relief and development agency that defines itself as the compassionate response of the Episcopal Church to human suffering around the world.

44 Whilst conducting the research, these community co-researchers were called "research assistants". This was a term that they appreciated as it gave them confidence but also clear boundaries to their responsibilities. However, in the aftermath of the project, the lead researchers chose the term "community co-researchers", as they felt this better represents the roles that were played by these six women.

founded by the Anglican Church in England in 1876 by Mary Sumner, the wife of an Anglican Rector. With the original aim of supporting mothers as they raised their children to be Christians, the union is now active in 83 countries with 4 million members in total.[45] While all national-level Anglican Mothers' Unions stem from Mary Sumner's organization in England (and, therefore, have a colonial history), they each have a certain level of freedom and autonomy in how they embody and interpret key Mothers' Union texts and teachings.

The research study was conducted in 2018–2019 in three congregations in Zambia, each from a different diocese (one rural, two urban). It was guided by the question "how and why do members of the MUZ contribute to and/or challenge violence against women and violence against children?". A multi-pronged, qualitative approach was used, including a) PhotoVOICE 2.0; b) key informant interviews (KIIs); and c) focus group discussions (FGDs). Extensive data was collected during this period, culminating in 238 photographs and 238 voice notes, 24 KII transcripts, and 8 FGD transcripts and translations. During the endline analysis process, 18 Photoboards and 6 Voice Note boards were created by the community co-researchers. Ethical permission for this research was secured at multiple levels, from within academia and the churches and communities involved.[46] For the purposes of this article, the focus will only be on the PhotoVOICE 2.0 component of the research methods used.

An overview of the implementation of PhotoVOICE 2.0

PhotoVOICE 2.0 has five main steps, within which PABR is concretized in various ways. With all five steps, the participatory role of the people affected by the issue under consideration is deepened. They function as "institutional insiders" of the space being researched, and as co-researchers and co-creators, rather than only participants in or subjects of the research. Below we discuss each step in two paragraphs: the first details how the steps can

45 Mothers' Union A. 2018. Our story. [Online] https://www.mothersunion.org/our-story/our-history.

46 The study in Zambia was conducted with permission from the Anglican Diocesan Bishops, Parish Priests and the Mother's Union Leadership from the targeted Zambian Anglican Dioceses and parishes. A range of measures were put into place to ensure consent and confidentiality at all levels of the process. International ethical clearance was received from the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee: Humanities.

be more generally implemented in PhotoVOICE 2.0, the second explores how it was applied in Zambia, specifically.

Baseline training

Baseline training of the community co-researchers is an important component of PhotoVOICE 2.0., whereby participation was emphasized in the selection of the diverse group of community co-researchers. The training process prioritizes trust-building, the sharing of experiences and opinions, and the capacitating of community co-researchers, including how to collect stories and photos from others in ethical ways. Where the research focuses on complex, sensitive topics (such as gendered or child violence), the baseline training by the lead researchers offered an opportunity to ensure that community co-researchers have an enriched and shared understanding of the various drivers and issues relevant to the topic they would be photographing, which, in turn, would lead to more nuanced photos and voice notes. Practical issues are also covered, such as the use of relevant technology, confidentiality, how to take good photos and record oral voice notes, asking permission to take photos in safe, ethical ways, and more.

In Zambia, the in-person baseline training took place over four days. It focused on developing the six community co-researchers' understanding of the evidence base around the various drivers and root causes of violence against women and violence against children. It also included training around photo-taking, storytelling, interpreting photos, ethics and mobile technologies. The training was experiential and participatory, using a feminist framework and drawing on arts-based methods such as songs, connection games, and interactive bible studies. This helped to build the critical awareness and confidence of the community co-researchers, but also built trust and shared understanding and interaction between them and the lead researchers.

Data collection

With PhotoVOICE 2.0, data collection includes both visual imagery and oral storytelling as part of PABR. Community co-researchers take several photos over an extended period (preferably 4-6 months) while based in their local, "home" contexts, insiders to the space (e.g., the organization or institution) being researched. Photos are taken on smartphones and shared directly, and confidentially, in real time with the lead researchers using WhatsApp,

with each photo accompanied by a 30-60 second oral voice note (a significant adaptation to the original Photovoice). These voice notes can be in the language the community co-researcher feels most comfortable with. Community co-researchers are also intentionally invited to speak from their personal viewpoints and include their own emotions, feelings, analysis, and questions in the voice notes where appropriate (that is, not only a description of the photo). In this way, the voice note serves as a first step of interpretative analysis by the individual community co-researcher that often involves deeper oral engagement with the subjects of the photo. The lead researchers similarly reply in real time, acknowledging the submission. WhatsApp also allows for continuous communication and input from the lead researchers, which helps ensure that community co-researchers stay motivated and feel supported. More intentional forms of support and motivation can also be implemented through things like monthly group meetings, for example. The continuous connection provided by WhatsApp also helps ensure a continued connection between the research team members, despite often being geographically dispersed, which in turn motivates community co-researchers to remain committed to the study.

In Zambia, each community co-researcher received a smartphone, monthly airtime, and a small stipend for the duration of the data-collection period. A private WhatsApp group with the lead researchers was created for each community co-researchers in which they would share their photos and voice notes with the lead researchers as well as with an in-country project assistant who spoke the local languages. Where a community co-researcher preferred doing voice notes in a local language, the project assistant would immediately translate the voice note and record the English version on the same WhatsApp group. There was also a shared WhatsApp group that included all six community co-researchers in which the lead researchers shared regular encouraging messages and monthly 3-minute video clips as motivation and reminders of important or relevant issues. This also enabled the lead researchers to be adaptive and flexible in response to how the process evolved. Below is one example of a photo and voice note taken (from the 238 that were collected in total) and shared by Jane, one of the six community co-researchers:

"This is a story of a husband and a wife who've been married for over ten years and have three children…girls. One day the husband went out to do his usual business where he at times stays away for a week plus. Only on this time, this day that he came home with a boy child. The wife is shocked. She doesn't know what do to. She's already a mother of three. The challenge is how to accommodate the boy. I feel the husband is not fair to the wife because God is the one who blesses us with children. By bringing a boy child in the house it's like he judged that the woman can't give him a boy child" (Jane, voice note, 27 August 2018).

Endline analysis

The endline analysis uses PABR methods (the building of Photoboards and Voice Note Boards) to enable participant-led analysis and stimulate group discussion, as well as creating new research artefacts designed by the community co-researchers. Transcribed voice notes are matched with photos and printed, with each community co-researcher receiving copies of the photos and voice notes that they collected and shared. During the (ideally in-person) analysis process at endline, each community co-researcher analyses their own photos in a process called Photoboarding. Here, each community co-researcher selects multiple photos to create a collage and orally present it to the others for discussion. Notes should be taken of these discussions that then form part of the research data set. It can also be useful to have the discussions recorded and transcribed. The Photoboards are created in response to a specific question or instruction from the lead researchers related to the original research question. In this way, the community co-researchers are guided in the second step (the first being the voice notes accompanying the photos) of the analysis of their own photos and relooking at their initial interpretations. Voice Note Boards can also be created.

In Zambia, the endline analysis workshop took place in-person over two and a half days. Each community co-researcher created three Photoboards. In Photoboard 1, each community co-researcher reviewed their photos and built a Photoboard that illustrated what they identified as the central theme across their photos. In Photoboard 2, the community co-researchers used their photos to answer the main research question of the project. They were presented with lightly drawn concentric circles on their board and asked to place their photos along the circles to indicate how relevant they felt the photo was in answering the main research question. In the final Photoboard, the community co-researchers worked with a second framework for analyzing the data (that had been introduced in the baseline training), namely the "social norms tree".[47] '

Edith's Photoboard 2, 4 February 2019

A Voice Note Board was also created by each community co-researcher. Each one reviewed their transcribed voice notes, selected those they found the strongest and most relevant to the research question, and built a Voice Note Board, choosing a heading that indicated its main theme/s.

[47] This "social norms tree" framework is explored in more detail in the Discussion section.

Analysis and integration

Another level of analysis of all the Photovoice material is then conducted by only the lead researchers. All the data, including from the group analysis process, is included here. This includes photos and voice notes, Photoboards and Voice Note boards, and any notes/transcriptions from endline analysis discussions and exit interviews.

In Zambia, the lead researchers reviewed each community co-researcher's photos, voice notes, Photoboards, and Voice Note Boards as a whole, identifying what they took photos of, what types of issues each one focused on, and the overarching themes of each community co-researcher's photos. Each community co-researcher's Photoboards and Voice Note board were analyzed, as well as the three photos that each community co-researcher selected as their favorites, and the transcript of the exit interview that were conducted with each community co-researcher. A synthesis document was then created for each community co-researcher based on all these processes, summarizing the community co-researcher's photos, emerging themes, and overall focus. This was then used to write the final internal research report.

Dissemination and uptake

One of the key aims of the original Photovoice (as designed by Wang and Burris) is to more effectively reach policymakers with research findings to enable community change. PhotoVOICE 2.0 shares this aim of supporting the wider uptake and impact of the research within the institution itself. The dissemination and uptake of the research and its findings is a key component of the method, planned for from the inception of the project. This also challenges the lead researchers to rethink traditional ways of academic dissemination (e.g. journal articles, conference proceedings) and instead prioritize timely dissemination that uses the findings and PABR methods to most directly respond to the needs and priorities of the community co-researchers, and engage with the communities and organizations in which the research took place to align suggestions for change with their mandates. In Zambia, for example, a one-day meeting with senior faith leaders (both male and female) within the Zambian Anglican Church and MUZ was organized, where the research findings were shared and discussed. As part of this, a physical PhotoVOICE 2.0 exhibition was set up to showcase the Photoboards, photos, and voice notes created by the community co-

researchers, which (whilst protecting their anonymity) enabled their voices, images, and analysis to be directly present. Moreover, the exhibition played a role in transforming the awareness of these senior policy makers/leaders as to the unintentional ways in which violence against women and against children could be perpetuated by religious institutions. In the later stages of dissemination, direct use of the photos and oral voice notes (often played directly to audiences) was an important feature in creating an interactive and empathic set of ongoing conversations with diverse groups of senior leaders and policy makers. This was identified as methodologically innovative and offered an important counterpoint to the typical word-based, numbers-centerd briefs. Moreover, it invited these senior leaders to see, hear, and understand the harmful aspects of their institutions that they may have previously been unaware of, and to build political will for positive change from within.

Discussion

In the light of the implementation of the PhotoVOICE 2.0 pilot in Zambia, the lead researchers identified several key insights regarding how the method enables feminist research and PABR. These are discussed below to strengthen the understanding of the method and encourage its further use.

PABR aims to amplify marginalized voices and experiences, improve accessibility to non-academic audiences, and showcase more nuanced and affective ways of knowing. In doing so, it emphasizes two core tenets as part of the research process: participation, so as to democratize the research process and steer it towards practical social change; and the use of art forms as methodological tools that broaden what is captured as knowledge. Various authors have highlighted the value of PABR in community-based research with vulnerable populations.[48] PhotoVOICE 2.0 centers PABR throughout the research process, maximizing the opportunities for those benefits of PABR to be realized.

[48] Seppälä et al., “Arts-Based Methods”. See also Coemans, Sara, Qingchun Wang, Joyce Leysen and Karin Hannes. “The use of arts-based methods in community-based research with vulnerable populations: Protocol for a scoping review,” International Journal of Educational Research 71, (2015): 33–39.

What emerged from the Zambia pilot is the understanding that the technological component of PhotoVOICE 2.0 (photos, voice notes, use of WhatsApp) enables more PABR approaches to be present throughout the entire research process and not only during the data collection stage. For example, the voice notes shared via WhatsApp meant that community co-researchers would undertake the first step of data interpretation and analysis without influence from other community co-researchers or the research leads. This also reduced the social desirability bias that may be present once they are with their peers or the research leads. Another example is the photos and voice notes that were exhibited and played during dissemination events. These forms of data challenge and enlarge the scope of what is often considered to be knowledge and evidence and, as a result, connects with and impacts various audiences in different ways by surfacing voices that are deeply affected by hidden patterns of violence and may be at odds with, or even be unintended results of, formal institutional policies or teachings.

The technological component of PhotoVOICE 2.0 has meant that the participation of community co-researchers, as insiders to the space and issues being studied, were constantly present and steering the research in a much more comprehensive way, as well as continuously being offered the autonomy and agency to express their own concepts, feelings, ideas, and interpretations. For example, PhotoVOICE 2.0's use of WhatsAppS enabled the community co-researchers to engage in a first step of real time interpretation with each photo they shared, unlike Photovoice, where such analysis is only developed at the end when the photos are printed. This confirms the wider value of PABR, but also PhotoVOICE 2.0 specifically, where the technology-assisted dimensions enable more democratic, inclusive, and representative research that allows for the complex feelings of subjects and co-researchers to be captured. The voice notes, especially, enable reflection on the intricate dilemmas that are present in a specific photo. While the use of insider voices in research has both advantages and disadvantages,[49] the diversity of insiders used also helps identify silences or gaps across the data. For example, while many photos were taken of child neglect, very few were taken of corporal punishment, making it clear that

[49] See, for example, George D Chryssides and Stephen E Gregg, (eds.) The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion. (Bristol: Equinox, 2019).

most of the community co-researchers did not recognize this as a form of violence against children.

PhotoVOICE 2.0 amplifies insider voices in ways that can support feminist research aims for social transformation. This takes place mainly by comprehensively centralizing community co-researchers situated within the organizations or institutions being researched. This is done by creating (compared to Photovoice) multiple opportunities for community co-researchers to record, reflect, and interpret data in ways that allows for their own feelings and interpretations to be included. From the pilot in Zambia, four important insights emerged about how and what insider positioning allows for in PhotoVOICE 2.0.

First, the implementation of PhotoVOICE 2.0 in Zambia showed that the pre-existing status of the community co-researchers as insiders to the system(s) being studied was critical for research success. As insiders within the MUZ, the six women who had been trained as community co-researchers had unique and trusted access to the policies, structures, symbols, educative practices, and social norms of the organization. This enabled them to identify and reflect critically by drawing on their own experiences, feelings, and opinions around issues that might be hidden from the public or from researchers coming in from the outside. For example, Mary took a photo of the MUZ headscarf that members received after an internal training process. She shared that, while the original intention of the headscarf is to symbolize the importance of confidentiality (no gossiping) for MUZ members, in practice it often functions as a way to keep patterns of family-related violence hidden as shameful secrets (with the underlying idea that a good MUZ wife does not talk about what happens in her family and home). In her Photoboard analysis, Mary chose to place this image at the center of her answer to the research question about what she feels fuels violence against women in the MUZ:

"This picture shows the head veil of the Mothers Union uniform which has got the sign on top. It means that every Mothers Union (member) must keep secrets that are known to herself, but are not known to others. Even if she has any problem, she can't tell anyone".
Mary, voice note, 19 October 2018

Second, by developing this insider role, the community co-researchers had pre-existing credibility from which to engage directly with other MUZ and community members. This trusted access to the experiences, feelings, and opinions of others in the community was brokered through their long-term peer relationships and enabled them to collect sensitive photos and stories more widely, often from one-on-one interactions. This also reduced the power dynamics of research engagement by outsiders whilst amplifying hidden voices, experiences, and stories around taboo topics. For example, family-related violence emerged as a primary concern across many photographs and voice notes, with complex intersections identified between violence against wives and against children. Many photos told a story about how wives were frequently encouraged (by other women) to remain in violent marriages for the sake of their children's economic future and safety, creating real-life dilemmas for them. See, for example, this voice note which accompanied a photo of a young woman sitting on the ground with her children:

> *"*This woman you see is married and has kids, but she's physically abused by her husband to such a dangerous extent. Every time she decides to leave, she thought to come back for the sake of her children. As you see her now, she was from being beaten to the extent that she can't even stand up on her own. She has to be helped up." *(Emeldah, 18 September 2019)*

Third, PhotoVOICE 2.0 allowed insiders that were perceived as low on the social hierarchy in their institution to speak back, freely yet safely and anonymously, to those higher up in the same hierarchical power structures. This also has gendered dimensions as most formal religious leaders in the Anglican church are male compared to the majority of those attending churches who are female. PhotoVOICE 2.0's use of technology enabled these voices to be directly heard. At the same time, it allowed a masking of identity where needed. In Zambia, this meant that each community co-researcher and wider participant could decide how to be represented: some wanted their name and details shared, others wanted to be anonymized. Those insider voices and decisions are also directly present in the research dissemination through technology-assisted artifacts created by the community co-researchers (e.g., photos, voice notes, Photoboards) and carry the authority, feelings and insights of insider perspectives for those

higher in the organizational hierarchy to be invited to see, hear, and respond to. Viewers are presented with an opportunity to visualize violence against women and children through the eyes of those directly affected and those who bore witness to its presence within their own community. The pictures, voice notes, and the ethical process that underpins their taking offer a gaze of resistance, inviting more audiences to think about what they see and interpret what they are asked to witness. For example, one woman had run to the forest in fear with her young baby to hide from her husband and abusive in-laws but was still willing to stand proud in front of a camera and to share her story as a survivor.

Finally, by amplifying and centralizing the voices of insiders positioned lower in the formal institutional hierarchies at multiple stages of the research process, the PhotoVOICE 2.0 method has inherent disruptive and decolonizing power to un-silence and make visible images and stories simultaneously. This was showcased in the Zambia research, where women within the MUZ were equipped to speak about, and directly to, the women-led structures of which they are also a part. The innovation of voice notes also offers a subversive counter to research the risks of infantilizing religious women[50] by showcasing their own critical reflections on their religious movements whilst simultaneously recognizing the MUZ's value and meaning in their lives. This more nuanced picture holds complexities and ambiguities in ways that can help support an organization's own social transformation from within. Indeed, the community co-researchers noted that it was often in the process of taking photographs that they began to see the hidden forms of violence and understand the complex stories behind them.

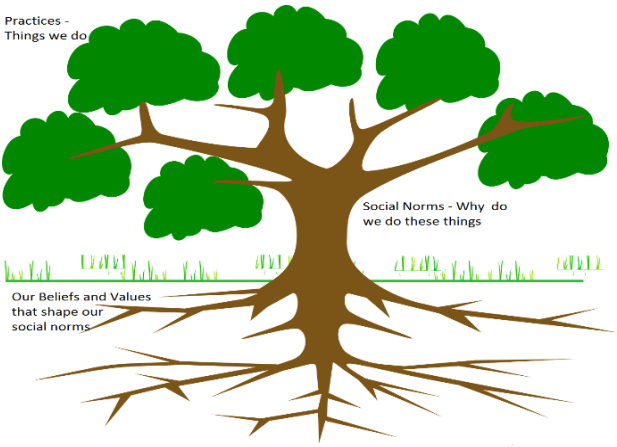
The pilot in Zambia also illustrated how empowering PhotoVOICE 2.0 was for all the diverse community co-researchers. Rather than only offering a one-off opportunity for these individuals to speak (such as an interview or focus group), the method consistently created ongoing opportunities for diverse community co-researchers to offer their multi-vocal insights and opinions. Beatrice, one of the community co-researchers who is married with eight children and living in a rural area, explained in her exit interview that the process had impacted her own sense of self and role in the community:

50 Elisabet le Roux, "Can religious women choose? Holding the tension between complicity and agency," African Journal for Gender and Religion 25, no.1 (2019): 1–19.

"I feel important now. (They say of me) 'that is the lady that takes the pictures of us' and I feel proud of that" (Beatrice, 5 February 2019).

By intentionally developing the role of local community co-researchers as central to the PhotoVOICE 2.0 method, significant time and attention is also given to the initial in-person training, ongoing mentoring, and support of the community co-researchers and their skills development. To support this process of feminist empowerment, a number of analysis tools were developed and shared with the community co-researchers to increase their critical awareness on how violence can be normalized. In Zambia, one community co-researcher, who had never held a camera before this project and whose voice notes were primarily delivered in her local language, reflected that, "In the community, I just used to look at things and people and their problems as normal. But after I came here and being taught, I started to see things differently, to say there must be a solution to all these" (Emeldah, 5 February 2019). Many practical tools were shared with the community co-researchers to help facilitate their emerging analysis abilities whilst prioritizing their agency and decision-making. One example of these diverse techniques shared with the community co-researchers was the "social norms tree",[51] an analysis tool originally developed by the authors in relation to a research study on understanding religious forms of resistance to end child marriage.

[51] Elisabet le Roux & Selina Palm. What lies beneath? Tackling the roots of religious resistance to ending child marriage. (London: Girls Not Brides, 2017).



The three levels of this tree invite community co-researchers to not only capture images and insights at the top (leaves and fruit), such as, the various acts of violence they see around them, but also asks them to analyze and capture their own reflections and images around why these may happen in their contexts (the trunk of the tree) and the beliefs and values that underpin them (the roots).

In Zambia, the social norms tree was first introduced during the in-person group training in an interactive group exercise. It also provided an ongoing frame that community co-researchers could use as they collected their photo and voice note data, with video mentoring reminding them to keep looking at all three levels and informing their real time voice note analysis of their photos. Furthermore, the social norms tree also formed the framework for one of the three Photoboards designed during the endline analysis. Finally, the social norms tree was a powerful tool for research dissemination, showcasing the interconnections made by the community co-researchers beyond the descriptive, and inviting audiences to look beyond the surface of what they may see to further learn, explore, and better understand the complex interconnections between violence, social norms, values, and beliefs.

Practical tools such as this tree similarly enabled community co-researchers to take a critical approach to their own social identities and reflect both on what they felt lay beneath the violence they were capturing and the ways in

which they felt the MUZ could contribute to finding or working towards solutions. The six community co-researchers remained personally committed to the MUZ whilst also wanting to take a more active role in changing aspects of its practices that they viewed as being harmful. One community co-researcher noted that, as a result of this process, she was inspired to remain in the MUZ and to help it become a different Mothers Union that helped solve the identified issues and problems.

Conclusion

PhotoVOICE 2.0 emerged as an intentional adaptation of Photovoice, developed in response to a particular research question in a specific context. It enabled the lead researchers to collaborate closely with women insiders within a religious institution whose official mandate centered the support and protection of both wives and children, and gain a deeper understanding of the complex, challenging, and often taboo realities of multiple relationships involving violence and the ambivalent cultural and religious frameworks around them, especially within homes and families. This method offers concrete ways of centering feminist principles in the research project as a whole while also allowing for the dissemination of research findings in creative and non-traditional ways that showcases the community co-researchers' voices and agency directly to senior leaders within these institutions and beyond. PhotoVOICE 2.0 has continued to evolve since this first pilot in 2018 and has already been used in different ways in two other research studies, both studying gendered violences at specific university campuses in South Africa.[52] The method centers the knowledge insights of community co-researchers whose voices and experiences have often been excluded or diminished within existing power structures. Their multi-vocal insights as insiders to the systems being researched give it extraordinary disruptive power to subvert existing hierarchies of knowledge and control, and to make visible and verbalize both the stories and images that lie beneath normalized practices of violence. PhotoVOICE 2.0's technology-

[52] For more information on the use of PhotoVOICE 2.0 to study campus rape culture at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, see www.campusrapeculture.co.za. For more information on its adapted use at the University of Western Cape in South Africa, see Selina Palm, A space to feel free? Digital Storytelling around gender-based violence at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Findings from student-led research in 2022. South Africa: University of the Western Cape, 2019.

assisted dimensions significantly amplify whose voices are heard and counted, and in what ways, as a central part of the wider project of feminist research that aims to contribute towards long-term social transformation. This research method offers a tangible, concrete, and real-time invitation to leaders and policy makers within the institutions concerned to hear and see differently and to allow this to nurture social change from within in ways that align with their institutional mandates.

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Advancing Gender Equality in Muslim Leadership: Women's Representation in Ulama Bodies in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

In the post-apartheid landscape of South Africa, the constitutional promise of equality continues to challenge traditional power structures, particularly within religious institutions. This article critically examines the systematic exclusion of women from leadership roles in Muslim ulama bodies, despite significant advancements in religious education and scholarly achievements by Muslim women. The research argues that the exclusion of women from ulama bodies is neither theologically justified nor practically defensible. By drawing on egalitarian interpretations of Islamic traditions, historical examples of women's scholarly contributions in Islam, and contemporary global practices of women's religious leadership, the article challenges entrenched patriarchal interpretations that restrict women's roles. Specifically, this study explores the historical context of the Muslim community in South Africa, the current composition of ulama bodies, and the extensive scholarly achievements of Muslim women. It highlights how these bodies wield considerable authority in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and issuing religious legal opinions, yet remain exclusively male-led. The article reveals that Muslim women in South Africa are now extensively educated in Islamic sciences and are fully capable of occupying leadership positions. By advocating for gender diversity in religious leadership, the research proposes a path towards more inclusive, representative, and equitable religious governance that aligns with both Islamic principles and South Africa's constitutional values of gender equality.

KEYWORDS
Gender equality, religious leadership, ulama bodies

Introduction

In the post-apartheid landscape of South Africa, the constitutional promise of equality continues to challenge traditional power structures across all societal domains, including religious institutions. Despite notable progress in many areas, gender equality in religious spheres remains a significant

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challenge.[1] This article examines a critical, yet often overlooked, dimension of gender inequality within the Muslim community: the systematic exclusion of women from leadership roles in ulama bodies.[2] Despite significant advancements in religious education and scholarly achievements by Muslim women, these bodies remain predominantly male-controlled,[3] perpetuating a patriarchal interpretation of Islamic leadership that stands in stark contrast to both the egalitarian principles of Islam and the constitutional imperatives of South Africa's democratic society.

The underrepresentation of women in ulama bodies is not merely a matter of institutional gender bias, but a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and interpretative constraints that have long limited women's participation in religious leadership. While Muslim women in South Africa have made remarkable strides in religious scholarship—obtaining advanced degrees, establishing educational institutions, and developing nuanced theological perspectives—they continue to be systematically excluded from decision-making structures that profoundly impact their community's religious, legal, and social landscapes.

This research argues that the exclusion of women from ulama bodies is neither theologically justified nor practically defensible. By drawing on historic examples of women's scholarly contributions in Islam, contemporary

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1 Dimpho Takane Maponya, "Religion, Patriarchy and the Prospect for Gender Equality in South Africa," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 82, no 4–5 (2021): 337–349; Hannelie J. Wood, "Gender Inequality: The Problem of Harmful, Patriarchal, Traditional and Cultural Gender Practices in the Church," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019).

2 Ulama bodies are councils of Muslim, male theologians located in the various provinces of South Africa.

3 Ulama bodies, like the Muslim Judicial Council, only have male members on their executive structures (see: https://mjc.org.za/about-mjc/team/). Other ulama bodies, like the Muslim Assembly in Cape Town, have women on their executive structure, but men still dominate these structures and the *qāḍi* who hears *faskh* applications is a male imam (see: https://muslimassembly.org.za/about-us/). In the northern provinces of South Africa, women do not have access to mosques, let alone access to leadership structures on ulama bodies. In this regard see, Uta Christina Lehmann, "Women's Rights to Mosque Space: Access and Participation in Cape Town Mosques" in *Women, Leadership, and Mosques – Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority*, eds. Masoodah Bano and Hilary Kalmbach (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 498.

global practices of women's religious leadership, and South Africa's constitutional commitment to gender equality, this article challenges the entrenched patriarchal interpretations that restrict women's roles. Moreover, the argument extends beyond academic discourse, proposing that the inclusion of women in ulama bodies is not just a matter of equity but a critical pathway to more comprehensive, empathetic, and representative religious governance.

The article is structured across several key sections to comprehensively explore this complex issue. It begins by providing the historical context of the Muslim community in South Africa, tracing their origins and development. The second section delves into the existing Muslim leadership landscape, specifically examining the role and composition of ulama bodies. It then critically analyses the Islamic tradition's perspectives on female leadership and provides both historical precedents and contemporary manifestations of women's religious leadership and scholarship. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the current state of Muslim women's scholarship in South Africa, highlighting the disconnect between educational achievements and leadership opportunities. It will also explore the constitutional implications of gender exclusion in religious structures, arguing that such practices potentially contravene the principles of equality enshrined in South Africa's democratic framework. The conclusion synthesizes these arguments, proposing a path forward for more inclusive and representative religious leadership.

The Muslim Community in South Africa

Theistic religions are the dominant religions in South Africa, with Islam being the religion of a small minority.[4] The Cape Muslim community is the oldest and largest Muslim community in South Africa.[5] The first Muslims arrived in South Africa from five main regions of the world: the Indonesian archipelago, Bengal on the South Indian Coast, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Madagascar, and the

[4] William J. Schoeman, "South African Religious Demography: The 2013 General Household Survey," *HTS Theological Studies* 1, 73, no. 2 (2017): 3, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i2.3837 last accessed on 29 November 2024.

[5] Suleman E. Dangor, "The Establishment and Consolidation of Islam in South Africa: From the Dutch Colonisation of the Cape to the Present," *Historia* 48, no.1 (2003): 209.

East African Coast.[6] In the 17th century, the first slaves, many of whom were Muslim, were brought by the Dutch East India Company from the aforementioned colonies to provide labor to the Dutch at the Cape.[7] In the first 150 years, the Dutch authorities restricted the religious rights of the Muslim community and prevented them from establishing places of worship in the Cape.[8] In addition to slave labor, hundreds of convicts and political prisoners from the Dutch colonies in the East Indies were brought to the Cape to serve out their sentences in the Dutch authorities' employ.[9] Among them were learned Islamic scholars like Abdullah Qadi Abd al-Salaam, commonly known as Tuan Guru, a former Prince of Tidore in the Ternate islands. He was one of the first prisoners to be held on Robben Island and subsequently became the imam[10] of the first mosque[11] established at the Cape in 1797, as well as a teacher at the first Islamic school (madrassa).[12] Through Tuan Guru and the efforts of others, Islam spread rapidly through the Cape in the first two centuries and was fully established by the 20th century through the setting up of numerous mosques, Islamic schools, non-governmental social welfare organizations and theological bodies.[13] As of 2013, Muslims comprised of 2% of the total South African population, with

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6 Achmat Davids, *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims,* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2011), 37.

7 Frank Bradlow, "The Origins of the Early Cape Muslims" in *The Early Cape Muslims,* eds. Frank R. Bradlow and Margaret Cairns (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1978), 86–91, 103–105, 118–124; Robert Shell, "The Establishment and Spread of Islam at the Cape from the Beginning of Company Rule to 1838" (Unpublished B.A. (Honours) manuscript, University of Cape Town (1974), 4–29.

8 Abdulkader I. Tayob, *Race, Ideology, and Islam in Contemporary South Africa* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 255-257.

9 Shell, "The Establishment and Spread of Islam at the Cape," 4–29.

10 The term "imam" is a title given to a religious leader who is usually based at a mosque. The imam leads the congregational prayers, delivers sermons, and fulfils other religious responsibilities within a community, such as officiating marriages and funerals.

11 The first mosque in the Cape was the Auwal Mosque in Bo-Kaap, Cape Town. Bo-Kaap was a designated "Malay" area during the apartheid regime and is one of the oldest Muslim communities in South Africa. See Ephraim C. Mandivenga, "The Cape Muslims and the Indian Muslims of South Africa: A Comparative Analysis." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20, no. 2 (2000): 347–352.

12 Achmat Davids, "Alternative Education: Tuan Guru and the Formation of the Cape Muslim Community," in *Pages from Cape Muslim History,* eds. Yusuf, Da Costa, and Achmat Davids. (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1994), 48–49.

13 Dangor, "The Establishment and Consolidation of Islam in South Africa", 48

most Muslims being concentrated in the Western Cape followed by KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.[14] Although there is a growing Shi'ite[15] Muslim community in South Africa,[16] most Muslims in South Africa are Sunni[17] with the majority adhering to the Hanafi or Shafi'i schools of law.[18]

Despite being a predominantly Sunni community, South African Muslims have been described as "heterogenous and plural" in both ideological and political expression.[19] Vahed highlights that Muslims in South Africa are deeply divided by race, doctrine, language, class, and ethnicity.[20] Geographically, the Indian community is concentrated in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, most people of color or Muslims of Malaysian/Indonesian descent live in the Western Cape, whereas Black African Muslims are scattered across townships throughout South Africa.[21] There are also growing Muslim immigrant communities who have settled in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban.[22] Consequently, regional differences in the way Islam is practiced and the different cultural origins impact the creation of gender-specific constructs. Thus, Western Cape Muslims are considered more liberal in their stance on gender issues, while Muslims from Gauteng

14 Schoeman, "South African Religious Demography", 3.

15 The Sunnis and Shi'ites are the two main doctrinal sects in Islam. Although they share fundamental beliefs, they differ in areas of theology, ritual practice, and beliefs on leadership and law.

16 Goolam Vahed, "Contestation and Transformation: Muharram Practices Among Sunnī Muslims in South Africa, 1860–2020," in *Non-Shia Practices of Muharram in South Asia and the Diaspora,* eds. Pushkar Sohoni and Torsten Tschacher (Routledge, 2021), 72.

17 Najma Moosa, *Unveiling the Mind: The Legal Position of Women in Islam: A South African Context* (Durban: Juta & Company, 2011), 28; Mandivenga, EC 'The Cape Muslims and the Indian Muslims of South Africa' 348.

18 Moosa *Unveiling the Mind,* 151; Mandivenga, "The Cape Muslims and the Indian Muslims of South Africa," 348.

19 Moosa, *Unveiling the Mind,* 146.

20 Goolam Vahed, "Islam in the Public Sphere in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Prospects and Challenges," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 27, no. 1 (2007), 116–149.

21 Vahed, "Islam in the Public Sphere in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 119.

22 Goolam Vahed and Shamil Jeppie, "Multiple Communities: Muslims in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *State of the Nation – South Africa 2004-2005*, eds. Daniel John, Roger Southall, and Jessica Lutchman (HSRC Press, 2005), 262–266; Sadouni Samadia. "Somalis in Johannesburg: Muslim transformations of the city." *Topographies of Faith*, Brill, 2013, 46.

and KwaZulu-Natal, who are descended from the Indian sub-continent, adopt a more conservative approach to gender roles in Islam.[23]

The segregation policies of apartheid led to the creation of insulated Muslim communities, allowing Islam to thrive within distinct geographical areas. These Muslim enclaves functioned as self-contained entities, shielded from the broader societal pressures and influences. According to Davids, apartheid spatial planning inadvertently safeguarded Islam and its adherents from outside influences.[24] With the dismantling of apartheid and the establishment of a constitutional democracy, the Muslim community in South Africa encountered a complex journey in redefining its identity in an open and democratic society.[25] Muslim communities found themselves integrated into a broader societal landscape where their identity was no longer shielded within insulated enclaves. This newfound openness posed both opportunities and challenges as Muslims grappled with asserting their cultural and religious distinctiveness while embracing the ideals of equality and inclusivity promoted by the post-apartheid era.[26] The struggle to establish a cohesive identity in this context involved negotiating how to preserve their heritage while adapting to the dynamics of a more diverse and pluralistic society.[27] The Muslim leadership in South Africa had to navigate similar challenges.

Muslim Leadership in South Africa

There is no single ulama body that represents or speaks on behalf of all South African Muslims.[28] These bodies are usually constituted of a legal

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23 Lehmann, "Women's Rights to Mosque Space," 498.

24 Nuraan Davids, *Women Cosmopolitanism and Islamic Education – One of the Virtues of Engagement and Belonging* (Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2013), 1.

25 Davids, *Women Cosmopolitanism and Islamic Education,* 6.

26 For a comprehensive historical overview of the South African Muslim community during and after the demise of apartheid, see Tayob, *Race, Ideology, and Islam in Contemporary South Africa*.

27 Tayob notes on the South African Muslim community, "Their experiences as a Muslim minority community living in secular democracy has thrown the community into global debates about Islam and Africa democracy." Tayob, *Race, Ideology, and Islam in Contemporary South Africa*, 280.

28 The 2018 South African Muslim Directory lists 11 theological bodies throughout South Africa, which includes the Muslim Judicial Council. However, this list is not exhaustive

scholar responsible for issuing legal opinions (fatwa) known as a mufti, a judge or a qādi who issues rulings specific to the case before him,[29] and Islamic scholars known as ālim(s), (ulamā(pl)), who also fulfil the role of, *inter alia,* imams in their respective communities. During apartheid, these ulama bodies operated within the confines of segregated Muslim communities, focusing primarily on religious affairs and serving as spiritual guides. However, in a post-apartheid South Africa characterized by democratic principles and multiculturalism, the role of ulama bodies expanded beyond religious matters to engage with broader societal issues such as social justice, human rights, and interfaith dialogue.[30] These bodies also faced the imperative to adapt their modus operandi to the transformed socio-political landscape.

In the Western Cape, as in other provinces, there are various ulama bodies to which imams belong, some of which are more established than others. For instance, the Muslim Judicial Council of South Africa (MJC) enjoys greater recognition and acceptance by the overall Muslim community in the Western Cape.[31] Bodies like the MJC are responsible for administering the community's religious and spiritual affairs.[32] They oversee Muslim marriages, divorces, and inheritance matters, vital roles that impact the status of individuals in the community.[33] Historically, Muslim marriages were

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and there are numerous other theological bodies not mentioned. See "Organisations – Theological," South African Muslim Directory, last modified 2023, https://www.samd.co.za/organisationstheological.php.

29 The qādi typically hears divorce (faskh) applications in the sharī'ah court. His ruling is only binding on the parties whose case he has heard. In this regard, see the case of the Muslim Judicial Council discussed in Fatima Essop, "Problems and Possibilities for Islamic Divorce in South Africa," *Islamic Divorce in the 21st Century – A Global Perspective*, eds. Erin E. Stiles and Ayang Utriza Yakin (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2022), 65.

30 In this regard, see Tayob, *Race, Ideology, and Islam in Contemporary South Africa*, 23.

31 On the MJC website, it describes itself, amongst others, as being "[t]he most representative and influential Muslim religious organisation in the Western Cape, recognised locally, nationally and internationally for the religious, cultural and organisational roles it plays in South Africa". "Significance of the MJC," Muslim Judicial Council (SA), https://mjc.org.za/about-mjc/significance/.

32 F. Cachalia, "Citizenship, Muslim Family Law and a Future South African Constitution: A preliminary enquiry," in Najma Moosa and Suleiman Dangor (eds) *Muslim Personal Law in South Africa: Evolution and Future Status,* (Cape Town, Juta, 2019), 75.

33 See Fatima Essop, "Do Islamic Law Wills Contravene the Common Law Prohibitions Against Delegation of Testamentary Powers and Incorporation by Reference?" *South*

not recognized under South African law because of their potentially polygamous nature.[34] As a result of this non-recognition, parties to a Muslim marriage did not resort to state courts when seeking to enforce their rights in their Muslim marriage or when seeking an Islamic divorce. Instead, Muslim spouses would approach ulama bodies. It is trite Islamic law that a Muslim husband can obtain a divorce through the utterance of a unilateral divorce pronouncement, referred to as a talāq. He does not have to approach a court to exit a marriage. A wife, however, must approach an ulama body and apply for a divorce if she wishes to exit an unhappy or abusive marriage in a process referred to as a faskh. Ulama bodies, like the MJC run their own shariah courts that hear faskh applications. These shariah courts are officiated by a male judge (qādi) who are scholars schooled in the Islamic laws of marriage, divorce, and inheritance.[35] The interpretation and application of Islamic divorce laws do not always favor female litigants as the court may choose to apply more restrictive interpretations when deciding whether to grant the wife a divorce. Essop notes that a qādi is less likely to grant a faskh on the grounds of emotional abuse, despite it being acceptable grounds to grant a faskh in the Māliki school.[36] Ulama bodies furthermore

African Law Journal 140, no. 3 (2023): 579; Essop "Problems and Possibilities for Islamic Divorce in South Africa," 65; Nina Hoel, "Engaging Religious Leaders: South African Muslim Women's Experiences Matters Pertaining to Divorce Initiatives," *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 2 (2012): 184.

34 For an account of why Muslim marriages were not recognized by South African courts and how the validity of a Muslim marriage has been endorsed by the courts after the demise of apartheid, see Waheeda Amien, "A South African Case Study for the Recognition and Regulation of Muslim Family Law in a Minority Muslim Secular Context" *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 24, no. 3 (2010): 361–396; Waheeda Amien, "Judicial Intervention in Facilitating Legal Recognition (and Regulation) Of Muslim Family Law In Muslim-Minority Countries," *Journal of Islamic Law* 1, no. 1 (2020): 65; Najma Moosa, "Muslim Personal Law – To be or Not to be?" *Stellenbosch. Law Review* 6, (1995): 417; Najma Moosa "The Interim and Final Constitutions and Muslim Personal Law: Implications for South African Muslim Women," *Stellenbosch. Law Review* (1998): 196.

35 Many women litigants who appeared before the sharī'ah court felt intimidated by the all-male court. See Essop "Problems and Possibilities for Islamic Divorce in South Africa," 72.

36 Essop "Problems and Possibilities for Islamic Divorce in South Africa," 75–76.

do not encourage or facilitate khul' as a form of divorce,[37] despite it being an acceptable form of terminating an Islamic marriage.[38]

With respect to inheritance, many Muslims ensure that their estates devolve according to Islamic inheritance law by stipulating this in their wills. They are assisted in this regard by legal professionals or ulama bodies like the MJC.[39] In the case of the death of a Muslim testator, the MJC is also responsible for drawing up distribution certificates that stipulate the heirs of a testator and their respective shares under Islamic law.[40] The MJC and ulama bodies like them thus wield considerable authority in determining how wealth is transmitted within Muslim families through the institution of inheritance. Their interpretation and application of Islamic inheritance laws are deferred to and relied upon: (i) by members of the Muslim community; (ii) by members of the legal profession involved in estate planning for Muslim testators; and (iii) by State officials, such as the Master of the High Court,[41] who are responsible for winding up the estates of the deceased.[42] As with divorce laws, male-dominated ulama bodies interpret and apply Islamic inheritance laws in ways that are not always favorable to women without taking into account the lived reality of women in society.[43]

In addition to the important decision-making powers in Muslim family law, ulama bodies are also responsible for issuing fatwa on any matter affecting

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37 Essop "Problems and Possibilities for Islamic Divorce in South Africa," 71–72. "Khul'" is a non-fault-based divorce that allows a wife to divorce her husband in exchange for forfeiting her dower (mahr) or providing her husband with some other form of financial compensation.

38 For more on khul' as a permissible form of divorce see Erin E. Stiles and Ayang Utriza Yakin "Introduction – Muslim Marital Disputes and Islamic Divorce law in Twenty-First-Century Practice," in *Islamic Divorce in the 21st Century – A Global Perspective*, eds. Erin E. Stiles and Ayang Utriza Yakin (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2022) 65.

39 See https://mjc.org.za/departments/fatwa/ and Essop "Do Islamic Law Wills Contravene the Common Law Prohibitions," 584.

40 Essop "Do Islamic Law Wills Contravene the Common Law Prohibitions," 596.

41 The Master of the High Court is an administrative body and one of its functions is to supervise the administration of estates of the deceased in terms of the Administration of Estates Act 66 of 1965.

42 Essop, "Do Islamic Law Wills Contravene the Common Law Prohibitions," 606–607.

43 See the findings in Fatima Essop, *The Intersection between the Islamic law of inheritance and the South African law of Succession* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town (2022)), 277–298.

the community, including whether it is permissible for women to conduct sermons before the weekly Friday prayers,[44] whether congregants should pray at home during a pandemic,[45] whether a surviving wife is entitled to inherit the residue of her husband's estate in the absence of other relatives,[46] and more. These legal opinions by ulama bodies impact the daily lives of Muslims directly. A fatwa is usually issued by the mufti of an ulama body who, in the case of the MJC, has always been a male scholar. According to the MJC website, its fatwa department consists of a full-time administrator, a mufti who is the head of the department, and a fatwa panel that consists of seven learned scholars of the shariah.[47] These scholars are all male. Although ulama bodies have no power to enforce their fatwa, they rely on their religious and moral authority when issuing their legal opinions.[48] As they are highly respected within the community, their legal opinions have great persuasive value and are generally adhered to by large portions of the community.[49] Evidently, ulama bodies fulfil an important role in the community and their decisions have far-reaching effects on all members of the Muslim community, but especially on women when it comes to the application of Muslim family law. This underscores the importance of having women represented in leadership roles on ulama bodies.

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44 Hoel, "Sexualising the Sacred, Sacralising Sexuality," 1–2.

45 Goolam Vahed, "COVID-19, Congregational Worship, and Contestation over 'Correct' Islam in South Africa," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 34, no. 1 (2021).

46 Essop "Do Islamic Law Wills Contravene the Common Law Prohibitions," 579–610.

47 "Fatwa," Muslim Judicial Council (SA), last modified 2023, https://mjc.org.za/departments/fatwa/.

48 Keshavjee correctly notes that a fatwa issued by any mufti is not a binding statement, nor is it a divine construct, as it can be changed, withdrawn, or challenged by a counter-fatwa. See Mohamed M. Keshavjee, *Islam, Sharia & Alternative Dispute Resolution – Mechanisms for Legal Redress in the Muslim Community* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2014), 74.

49 Keshavjee notes that a mufti derives his authority from his level of learning and through popular support and although there are no regulatory mechanisms for muftis, communities themselves invest a mufti with status and legitimacy. Keshavjee, *Islam, Sharia & Alternative Dispute Resolution,* 74.

Women leaders and scholars in Islam

The hadīth[50] of Muhammad (PBUH) that states, "Never will succeed such a nation as lets their affairs carried out by a woman",[51] is often used by orthodox Muslim scholars as proof that women should not occupy positions of leadership in Islam.[52] However there are divergent opinions on this hadīth, with some scholars holding the view that the prohibition applies to all leadership positions for women, whilst others opine that it is only a prohibition against women occupying the caliphate position or as a political leader of a country. [53] There are those who also argue that the hadīth is a fabrication and, as such, is inadmissible as proof in legal rulings.[54] The Quranic verse that stipulates that men are the guardians in charge (qawwamūn) of women[55] has also been interpreted to limit women's participation in leadership positions within the Muslim community.[56]Although this verse deals with men's legal responsibility to materially support their wives, parents, and children, it is often interpreted by male scholars to relegate women to an inferior position to men and, consequently, exclude

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50 The hadīth are reports that describe the words, actions or habits of Muhammad (PBUH). These reports were compiled over a century after his death and were completed over a period of more than three hundred years. They are regarded as one of the two primary sources of Islamic law. In this regard, see Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam – Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), 42.

51 *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Maghazi, The Prophet's letter to Caesar and Kaiser (732/7), no. 4425 as cited in Noor Mohammad Osmani, Mohammad Omar Farooq and Abu Umar Faruq Ahmad, "Women Empowerment and Leadership in Islam between Myth and Reality" in *Economic Empowerment of Women in the Islamic World – Theory and Practice* eds Toseef Azid and Jennifer L Ward-Batts *Advances in Research On Islamic Economic* Vol.1 (Singapore, World Scientific Publishing Vo. Pty. Ltd. 2020), 89

52 Osmani, Farooq, and Ahmad, "Women Empowerment and Leadership in Islam between Myth and Reality" 87; 103–104.

53 Ibrahim Zakyi, "Reinstating the Queens: Reassessing the Hadith on Women's Political Leadership," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 33, no. 2 (2016): v-x; Bakri, Syamsul. "Women's Leadership in Islam: A Historical Perspective of a Hadith." (2020): 219–234.

54 Osmani, Farooq, and Ahmad, "Women Empowerment and Leadership in Islam between Myth and Reality" 104-105; Zakyi. "Reinstating the Queens" vi; Syamsul, "Women's Leadership in Islam," 226–228.

55 The Qur'ān 4:34 states: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means." Yusuf Ali, *The Quran – Translation and Commentary* (Durban, Islamic Propagation Centre International,1946) 190.

56 Syamsul, "Women's Leadership in Islam," 223.

women from leadership roles.[57] Islamic feminist scholars like Wadud[58] and Barlas[59] challenge these traditional interpretations that use the verse to justify male superiority and argue, instead, for a contextual reading that emphasizes equality, mutual respect, and protection between men and women, rather than hierarchical dominance. They highlight that the patriarchal meanings ascribed to Quranic verses are largely a function of who is reading and interpreting them and the context in which those interpretations occur.[60] Moreover, they correctly argue that the Quranic values and teachings are egalitarian and antipatriarchal in nature and that these values should impact on the formation of legal rulings.

This egalitarian and antipatriarchal reading of Islamic texts finds expression in the numerous examples of women fulfilling scholarship and leadership roles in the history of Islam, starting with Aisha, Muhammad's (PBUH) wife. She was responsible for narrating over 2210 ahādith from Muhammad's (PBUH) life and she pronounced legal opinions on matters pertaining to worship, marriage, inheritance, and trade.[61] After Muhammad's (PBUH) death, her legal opinions were highly respected and remain critical to Islamic law today. She also lead the Muslim army in the Battle of the Camel, so-called because she directed the army from camelback.[62] There are

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57 This is one of the most contested verses in the Qur'ān and it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with in greater detail. For a more detailed analysis of the verse see: Amina Wadud, *Qur'ān and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspectiv*e (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), 70–73; Aysha A Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), 71–80; Shaikh Sa'diyya "Exegetical Violence: *Nushuz* in Qur'anic Gender Ideology," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 17 (1997), 49–73.

58 Amina Wadud, *Qur'ān and Woman,* 70–73.

59 Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam – Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2002). Hidayatullah also challenges men's exclusive authority to interpret the Qur'ān and argues that classical interpretations were based on "men's experiences" and that there was a need to add women's perspectives to these interpretations, Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* 35-36.

60 Mernissi also argues that the marginalization of women in many Muslim societies is a result of male religious elites controlling the interpretation of religious texts, rather than something that is inherent to Islam. In this regard see Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1993).

61 Carla Power, *If Oceans Were Ink – An Unlikely Friendship and Journey to the Heart of the Quran* (New York: NY: Henry Holt & Company, 2015), 139–141.

62 Power, *If Oceans Were Ink,* 141.

numerous other examples of women playing leadership roles in the time of Muhammad (PBUH),[63] serving as evidence of its permissibility in Islam. The Qur'ān, furthermore, praises the just rule of the Queen of Sheba who led the majority of her nation to believe in the monotheistic God, thereby giving further credence to leadership roles being occupied by women.[64]

Nadwi cites many examples of Muslim women, starting with the female companions of Muhammad (PBUH), who sought knowledge of the religion and then recorded, transmitted, and implemented it in his comprehensive work on women scholars in Islam.[65] Nadwi notes that some women scholars were so proficient in the study of the Islamic sciences that they became jurists and muftis.[66] Asma Sayeed's work also provides a historic overview of women as religious scholars from the first decades of Islam to the early Ottoman period (seventh to seventeenth centuries).[67] Both these works belie the myth that, historically, Islamic knowledge was solely the purview of men.

In contemporary times, we once again see the rise of women acquiring knowledge of Islamic science and fulfilling the role of the preacher and spiritual guide in Muslim communities around the world. In Morocco, the state institutionalized the role of the murshidah, a woman preacher trained and certified by the Moroccan state to offer spiritual counselling and instruction on Islamic doctrine and practice to women.[68] Women scholars have also been appointed to advisory positions in state religious councils,

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63 See further examples cited in Osmani, Farooq, and Ahmad, "Women Empowerment and Leadership in Islam between Myth and Reality," 96–99.

64 Q27:32-33 states: "She said: 'Ye chiefs! advise me in (this) my affair: no affair have I decided except in your presence.' They said: 'We are endued with strength, and given to vehement war: but the command is with thee; so consider what thou wilt command'" Yusuf Ali, *The Quran – Translation and Commentary* (Durban, Islamic Propagation Centre International,1946), 190.

65 Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithāt: The Women Scholars in Islam* 2nd ed (Johannesburg: Interface Publications, 2013). His work contains references to over nine thousand women scholars, ranging from the time of Muhammad to the twentieth century.

66 Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithāt,* 109. A mufti is a legal jurist who is authorised to issue a legal opinion (*fatwa*).

67 Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

68 Margaret J. Rausch, "Women Mosque Preachers and Spiritual Guides: Publicising and Negotiating Women's Religious Authority in Morocco." In *Women, Leadership, and Mosques*, eds. Masooda Bano and Hilary E. Kalmbach (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 59-83.

including the High Council of the Ulema, and in both these positions, women enjoy official state recognition and remuneration, equivalent to their male counterparts.[69] In Turkey, over 350 women work as preachers for Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs, many of whom are highly educated individuals with advanced degrees in Islamic Studies.[70] Hassan notes that "[w]ithin Turkish society at large, these female preachers are slowly altering the perception of men as the exclusive representatives of official religious authority in Turkey".[71] There are numerous other examples of Muslim women scholars reshaping notions of religious authority, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to highlight all of them.[72] Religious authority is a fundamental concept in religious studies as it determines who has the right to interpret sacred texts and guide the lives of adherents. Yet, it is clear that the influence of religious leaders and their teachings extends beyond the religious sphere, affecting social, political, and economic activities. As such, it is crucial to understand the dynamics that shape their ability to lead and how such leadership is constituted. This leads me to a discussion on female scholars and leaders in the South African Muslim community.

Where are the Muslim Women Scholars in South Africa?

The underrepresentation of Muslim women in leadership roles in religious structures in South Africa is rooted in historical, cultural, and social dynamics. By selectively interpreting both the prophetic hadīth that declares a nation will never succeed under female leadership and the Quranic verse designating men as guardians (qawwamūn) over women, conservative ulama have historically constructed theological arguments that limit women's participation in religious leadership roles. Furthermore, institutional barriers in ulama bodies, such as entrenched patriarchal hierarchies and resistance to change, impede the advancement of women.[73] Cultural norms also

69 Rausch, "Women Mosque Preachers and Spiritual Guides," 59.

70 Mona Hassan, "Reshaping Religious Authority in Contemporary Turkey: State-Sponsored Female Preachers" In *Women, Leadership, and Mosques*, 85-103.

71 Hassan, "Reshaping Religious Authority in Contemporary Turkey," 101.

72 For further examples of Muslim female scholars occupying positions of leadership in and outside of religious sacred spaces, see Bano and Kalmbach, *Women, Leadership, and Mosques*.

73 Naidu, Maheshvari, and Nina Hoel. "Continuities and Departures: Women's Religious and Spiritual Leadership," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 26, no. 2 (2013): 6–11.

prioritize male leadership, relegating women to supportive roles within the community.[74] Historically, a lack of access to education and resources has also restricted women's ability to challenge these structures and assert their leadership. Social and cultural expectations regarding women's roles as caregivers and homemakers often clashed with their aspirations for leadership roles, leading to internalized barriers among Muslim women. In some places in South Africa, like Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal, these barriers not only entailed a lack of representation of women on ulama bodies but included the prohibition of women accessing sacred spaces like the mosque.[75]

However, the political, social and religious landscape in South Africa has changed, and Muslim women have increasingly advocated for equal rights within sacred spaces and in the application of Islamic law.[76] As mentioned previously, Muslims in South Africa do not form a monolithic group, so while Cape Town mosques have historically provided facilities for women (albeit in a separate area of the mosque) this has not always been the case in Gauteng or KwaZulu-Natal.[77] The Malay, or Colored, culture prevalent in the Western Cape are more open and vibrant, allowing women's active participation in the community as well as greater access to the mosque.[78] By contrast, Muslims in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal who originate from the Indo-Pakistan region are generally considered more patriarchal, with greater restrictions being placed on women in both the public and private spheres. It is, therefore, no surprise that the fight for equal representation of Muslim women in sacred spaces originated in the Western Cape. In 1994, with the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town advanced the cause for women's equal access and participation in the mosque by allowing a Muslim women scholar, Amina Wadud, to deliver the sermon prior to the obligatory Friday weekly prayer, which had previously been a male prerogative.[79] Wadud addressed the entire

74 Women are inevitably relegated to roles like fundraising for the masjid, community projects, or running social outreach projects.

75 Lehmann, "Women's Rights to Mosque Space," 486 and 498. See also Hoel, "Sexualising the Sacred, Sacralising Sexuality," 26–41.

76 For a description of the gender jihad that occurred in South Africa see Lehmann, "Women's Rights to Mosque Space," 484–487.

77 Lehmann, "Women's Rights to Mosque Space," 487.

78 *Ibid,* 498.

79 *Ibid,* 498.

congregation from the main prayer area of the mosque where both men and women shared the same floor space. At the time, this event caused a major commotion in both Cape Town and the broader South African Muslim communities, and ulama bodies like the MJC condemned Wadud's actions.[80] However, thirty years later, the Claremont Main Road Mosque continues to have women give English sermons before the Friday prayers and though other imams have not followed suit at their mosques, they no longer condemn this practice at the Claremont Main Road Mosque.

Although male ulama are still regarded as the main authority on religious and legal matters in Islam, there is a growing trend within the South African Muslim community of challenging the exclusive claim of men to religious authority.[81] It has been argued that anyone who acquires the necessary religious knowledge should have the right to express him or herself from the mosque's pulpit.[82] By extension, anyone with the necessary religious knowledge should be given the opportunity to sit on leadership structures of ulama bodies irrespective of their gender. Interestingly, classical Islamic law scholars, like Abu Hanifa, allowed women to be judges and muftis in all matters, except financial and criminal matters, whilst Imam al-Tabari and Ibn Hazm held that women could be scholars in all issues.[83] However the question remains: where are the women scholars in South Africa?

Previously, religious knowledge in the South African Muslim community was predominantly a male privilege, where women had very little access to religious education beyond the madrassa system available to students that attended school.[84] There were limited opportunities for women to pursue further tertiary studies in the Islamic sciences, specifically relating to the Islamic legal sciences like the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (usūl al-

80 *Ibid,* 498.
81 *Ibid,* 93 and 493.
82 *Ibid,* 93.
83 Osmani, Farooq, and Ahmad, "Women Empowerment and Leadership in Islam between Myth and Reality," 107.
84 Lehmann, "Women's Rights to Mosque Space," 493.

fiqh) or Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh).[85] Knowledge of these legal sciences enables a scholar to devise legal rulings and opinions. Men pursued Islamic studies by leaving home to further their education in places like India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt,[86] while women were not granted the same opportunities. However, the religious educational landscape has changed dramatically in South Africa over the past 30 years and women now have equal access and opportunities to pursue the study of Islamic sciences, especially in the Western Cape. Currently there is a proliferation of Islamic educational institutions that accommodate both male and female students, including the International Peace College of South Africa (IPSA) that offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in Islamic Studies, as well as honours and master's programs in Islamic Studies.[87] Similarly, the Madina Institute provides a three-year Bachelor of Arts degree in Usūl ul Dīn for both men and women.[88] Female graduates from these institutions have been schooled in both the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (usūl al-fiqh) and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), the latter including the fiqh of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. There are furthermore numerous religious institutions directed solely at women that have flourished in the Western Cape over the past few years, including the Zahraa Institute that describes itself as an independent educational institution by women and for women and whose main focus is to educate women to navigate the Quranic text in the language of its revelation.[89] Similarly, there is the Qamar Institute that provides courses on Quranic Arabic as well as Islamic studies that women can easily access[90] and the Baseerah Institute that describes itself as "a female-led Islamic institution that seeks to raise the level of female education and scholarship through the teaching and publishing of traditional or well-known texts in a subject".[91] South African Muslim women currently have unprecedented

85 For a brief overview of these sciences and how they correspond to the South African legal system, see Fatima Essop, "Understanding the Islamic Legal System for South African Legal Practitioners," *Advocate* 3, (August 2023).

86 Hoel, "Engaging Religious Leaders," 184.

87 For a list of the Islamic courses offered by IPSA, see https://www.ipsa-edu.org/courses/bachelors-of-arts-islamic-studies

88 For a list of the Islamic courses offered by the Madina Institute, see https://madinainstitute.ac.za/3-year-bachelors-degree-usul-al-din/

89 For more details on Zahraa Institute, see https://www.zahraa.co.za/about-us/

90 For more on the courses being offered by Qamar Institute, see https://qamar.co.za/

91 For more on the courses being offered by the Baseerah Institute, see https://baseerahinstitute.org/

access to acquiring knowledge on the Islamic sciences and are qualifying with degrees that equip them with knowledge of laws relating to worship, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and finance.

In addition to women pursuing the traditional Islamic sciences, South Africa also sees Muslim women academics, like Sa'diyya Shaikh and Fatima Seedat, obtain degrees in Islamic studies from Western universities and go on to advocate for a more feminist hermeneutic when it comes to Quranic exegesis, especially in relation to verses of the Qur'an that have historically been interpreted to the detriment of women.[92] In this regard, they rely on and build upon the works of Islamic feminist scholars such as Aziza al-Hibri, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Kecia Ali to name a few,[93] to interpret Islamic texts in a more gender-sensitive manner. Evidently, there is no shortage of female Muslim scholars who have the religious knowledge and capability to occupy positions of leadership in ulama bodies. However, the expansion of educational opportunities for women has not been sufficient for significant change, as the increase in women's admission to the highest levels of Islamic education has not led to a corresponding rise in women holding high-level positions in ulama bodies.[94]

Consequently, although these female scholars are sufficiently qualified to (i) preside over shariah courts as judges (qādis); (ii) mediate inheritance disputes, and, (iii) issue fatwa as muftis on matters affecting the community,

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92 They have also penned a book together containing a collection of women-led sermons. Sa'diyya Shaikh, and Fatima Seedat, eds. *The Women's Khutbah Book: Contemporary Sermons on Spirituality and Justice from Around the World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2022).

93 Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15.

94 A similar trend was observed in Egypt, where Dr Su'ad Salih, a professor and department chair at Al-Azhar's Women's College, was unable to become a member of Egypt's Islamic Research Council because she only received one vote despite assurance from the late Shaykh al-Azhar (and former Grand Mufti), Shaykh Tantawi, that qualified women could become muftis, as depicted in Brigid Maher and Karen Bauer, *Veiled Voices,* DVD (Seattle, WA: Typecast Releasing, 2009). See also Hilary Kalmbach, "Introduction: Islamic Authority and the Study of Female Religious Leaders" in Bano and Kalmbach, *Women, Leadership, and Mosques,* 17.

they are not granted these opportunities by ulama bodies.[95] Currently, only male scholars or imams fulfil the role of the judge at the MJC shariah court despite it being mostly women litigants who approach the court for a divorce.[96] One of the imams who presided over the MJC shariah court had the following to say when questioned about the lack of female representation in the court:

> No, I mean gender is not an issue in determining the verdict. The Qadi is not worried whether you are a male or a female. That's not the issue here…[t]he text of fiqh will always be his yardstick in getting to his conclusion That's why I say gender is irrelevant when it comes to this case. It's just what the Fiqh says, it is what the text says, and we will grant the verdict based on that.[97]

The said imam appeared to be oblivious to the fact that many female litigants found the court setting intimidating, specifically because of the all-male panel hearing their divorce applications.[98] Approaching the shariah court as a woman and seeing an all-male panel might evoke concerns about representation and whether their perspective will be adequately understood and considered by the all-male bench. As one female participant noted after appearing before the court:

> You have to share your problems with them [the male judges]; I mean other women maybe have worse problems where they were

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95 Shaykha Mymoena Solomons was the first Muslim woman in Cape Town to pursue Islamic studies, Arabic, and Islamic law at Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt in the 1980's. Despite being highly educated in the classical Islamic sciences, she never received the recognition that male scholars of the same educational background received and was never invited to sit on the decision-making structures of any of the ulama bodies in Cape Town. She was often referred to as one of Cape Town's unsung heroes, see: https://vocfm.co.za/sa-muslim-community-rocked-by-the-passing-of-its-first-sheikha/ Similarly, Shaykha Rukkaya Samsodien, who founded the Baseerah Institute, is a highly qualified scholar in various Islamic sciences of jurisprudence. She spent six years studying Arabic and Islamic sciences in Syria and is more than adequately equipped to issue fatāwa on different matters. See https://baseerahinstitute.org/#about However she has yet to be invited to sit on the executive structures of the MJC.

96 Essop, "Problems and Possibilities for Islamic Divorce in South Africa," 73

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Ibid.*

> abused, maybe sexually or physically by their husbands. How do you tell all of this to a man?[99]

They may have concerns about potential bias or lack of understanding regarding issues specific to women or gender-related matters. In some cases, women litigants might feel disadvantaged or intimidated by the power dynamics inherent in facing a group of men, particularly if they perceive those men as holding authority over them. Women litigants may worry about being misunderstood or not being taken seriously, particularly if they perceive differences in communication styles between men and women. As such, I argue that gender diversity in shariah courts can help ensure a fair and inclusive judicial process and may alleviate some of the concerns that women litigants have when facing an all-male shariah court. In addition to sitting as judges in shariah courts, I argue that having women sit on fatwa committees at ulama bodies is essential as it would ensure a diverse range of perspectives, enriching the discourse within these decision-making structures and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the community's needs. Women's representation on ulama bodies would serve as a catalyst for social change within Muslim communities. It would also be consistent with the constitutional imperative to ensure gender equality in all structures of society, including religious structures.

Gender Equality a Constitutional Imperative in Religious Structures

The right to equality is one of the cornerstones of South Africa's democracy, one that has been entrenched in the Constitution[100] as a fundamental human right.[101] In addition to the constitutional provision, the right to equality

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99 *Ibid,* 72. See also case studies of women's experiences in the MJC sharī'ah court cited in Hoel, "Engaging Religious Leaders," 188–189.

100 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 ("Constitution").

101 Constitution, section 9 provides:
1. Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.
2. Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms…
3. The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social

is also protected under the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act[102] that prohibits any practice, including any religious practice, that impairs the dignity of women and undermines equality between women and men.[103] Consequently religious structures or institutions would be subject to constitutional scrutiny should they be legally challenged about practices that undermine equality between men and women. Ulama bodies might argue that women are excluded from leadership positions because of religious reasons by referencing the leadership hadīth or the Quranic verses cited above. Although the Constitution does protect the rights to religious beliefs and practices,[104] the courts will be circumspect in allowing discriminatory gender practices based on religious reasons.

In a pluralistic and multicultural society like South Africa, the courts will always be tasked with balancing the right to equality with the right to religious and cultural beliefs or practices. In the case of *Christian Education South Africa v Minister of Education,*[105] a group of Christian private schools applied for an exemption from legislation prohibiting corporal punishment from being administered in schools on the grounds that it was against their Christian beliefs and violated their religious freedom. The constitutional court held that individuals have no automatic right to be exempt from generally applicable laws on the grounds of religious beliefs.[106] The court rejected the claim for an exemption as the legislation served an important objective, namely the

origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth.

4. No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.

5. Discrimination on one or more of the grounds listed in subsection (3) is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair.

102 Act No. 4 of 2000 ("PEPUDA" or "the Equality Act").

103 Section 8 read as follows:
Prohibition of unfair discrimination on grounds of gender Subject to section 6, no person may unfairly discriminate against any person on the grounds of gender, including:…(d) any practice, including traditional, customary or *religious practice*, which impairs the dignity of women and undermines equality between women and men, including the undermining of the dignity and well-being of the girl child.

104 Constitution, s15(1): "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion."

105 2000 (4) SA 757 (CC).

106 *Ibid,* 35.

protection of children from abuse, degradation, and indignity.[107] The court held that the child's best interests are of utmost importance.[108] The court may show the same deference to gender equality if Muslim women challenged their lack of representation on ulama bodies.

Ulama bodies that exclude female scholars from their leadership and decision-making structures open themselves up to constitutional scrutiny in a similar fashion as discussed in the aforementioned *Christian Education* case.[109] The courts may regard the lack of female representation as contrary to the right to equality, despite their claim that their actions are based on religious precepts. It would be even harder for ulama bodies to justify this exclusion if the evidence clearly illustrates that Islamic law does not preclude women from fulfilling leadership roles and that women are fulfilling these roles in other jurisdictions, as mentioned above. Addressing the underrepresentation of Muslim women in leadership requires a multifaceted approach that challenges patriarchal interpretations of Islam, promotes gender equality, and fosters inclusive religious communities. By dismantling systemic barriers and empowering women, ulama bodies will be harnessing the full potential of its diverse Muslim population and fostering more equitable and representative religious structures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has argued that addressing the underrepresentation of Muslim women in ulama bodies is essential to advancing gender equality and fostering more inclusive religious communities in post-apartheid South Africa. By challenging patriarchal interpretations of Islamic law and advocating for the inclusion of women in

107 *Ibid,* 50.

108 *Ibid,* 41.

109 In *Fortuin v Church of Christ Mission of the Republic of South Africa* (3626/15) [2016] ZAECPEHC 18, a religious minister sought judicial review of the church's decision to prevent him from performing his pastoral duties as an ordained minister of his church. The court had to determine whether it had the power to review decisions taken by a church and whether the church had adhered to fair or equitable procedures when dealing with its religious minister. The court held that it had the power to interfere with the decision of the church because fundamental principles of fairness had been flouted. The case confirmed that civil courts have the authority to interpret a church order and to adjudicate accordingly by means of judicial review.

leadership roles, ulama bodies can better reflect the democratic principles upon which our democratic dispensation was founded. This inclusion would not only enrich the decision-making processes within these religious organizations, but also ensure that the diverse needs of the Muslim community are met. As South Africa continues to navigate towards a more inclusive society, the active participation of women in ulama bodies is a crucial step in realizing the constitutional imperative of equality for all citizens

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When Race, Rape, and Religion Collide: A Case Study of IPV, IPA, and Femicide Intervention during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

UN Women identified gender-based Violence (GBV) as the shadow pandemic of the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022. For almost two years, women and girls worldwide were sheltering in homes with abusive intimate partners and experiencing violent trauma and even death. The United States (US) was among the nations that experienced lockdown-related spikes in GBV. Indeed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that the domestic violence crisis peaked in early 2021 during the COVID-19 lockdown, mostly among women and children who were having to shelter with their abusers. Among this population of women living in the US who were experiencing the shadow pandemic were female college/university students who experienced either intimate partner violence (IPV) while sheltering with abusive partners and/or cyber intimate partner aggression (IPA) via technology and social media. Black female college students were not only victims of IPV and IPA but also of femicide during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a case study of an HBCU chaplain, this article explores intervention in and prevention of IPV, IPA, and femicide during the COVID-19 pandemic at the intersection of race, gender, class, and religion for African-descended female college students. Specifically, this article will investigate what role historical black college/university (HBCU) chaplains play in intervening in lockdown IPV, IPA, and femicide. Using the concept of positionality, the author argues that the HBCU chaplain is a key on-campus figure who can intervene and prevent sexual assault on college and university campuses. The article concludes with suggestions for necessary further research needed to address GBV on HBCU campuses.

KEYWORDS
Intimate Partner Violence, Intimate Partner Aggression, Femicide, campus sexual assault, Historical Black Colleges and Universities, role of chaplain, campus minister

"I know that I've got to forgive. I know that this is my brother in Christ," said Oluwatoyin (Toyin) Salau, a nineteen-year-old Florida A&M University (FAMU) student, remorsefully to campus minister/chaplain Rev. Latricia Edwards Scriven[1] during their conversation about being raped by her male

[1] Latricia Edwards Scriven, interview, September 5, 2020. Rev. Dr. Latricia Edwards Scriven gave permission to use her name and identity in this essay. The quotations are from Rev. Scriven's conversation about Oluwatoyin.

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roommate in March 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Toyin told her Black Lives Matter (BLM) activist friends about being raped by her male roommate, and with her permission her friends told Rev. Scriven. When Rev. Scriven spoke with Toyin over a two-day period, Toyin indicated to her that her assailant was not her romantic partner. During their conversations, Toyin recounted several incidents of sexual assault. Rev. Scriven stated that, “possibly within her family, that suggested a history of sexual abuse” and, as a result, "Sexual assault had become normalized for Toyin”. At the chaplain’s suggestion, Toyin agreed to leave her apartment and the abusive male roommate and stay with a female student activist friend. Over the following two days, Toyin worked with the BLM group at the New Life United Methodist Church where BLM from IMPACT@FAMU Wesley Foundation organized and prepared food. Together with that BLM group, Toyin attended a protest rally, at which time she accidentally left her phone at the church. She became separated from the BLM group during the rally but, as she later reported in some tweets, was able to find someone to take her back to the church to retrieve her phone and some other belongings. On June 6, 2020, BLM friends reported Toyin Salau missing. The news media subsequently reported the sequence of events using Toyin’s tweets:

> On that same day, Salau released a series of tweets detailing a sexual assault she said she had recently experienced. The thread of tweets starts off with Salau explaining that she had been staying at a church for safety due to “unjust living conditions.” That morning, she apparently got into the vehicle of a man who offered to give her a ride to get her belongings from the church and find somewhere to sleep. “He came disguised as a man of God,” she wrote. “I trusted the holy spirit to keep me safe.”

Salau went to the man’s home, took a shower, and changed into clothing that he provided her, she tweeted. Eventually, the man began to touch Salau without her consent. “He started touching my back and rubbing my body using my body until he climaxed and then went to sleep,” she wrote.

In the tweets, Salau noted that she had been the victim of another sexual assault in March. Salau says she told the man who picked her up that morning about the March assault. So, when he asked her if she wanted a massage and started touching her, she wrote, “I was laying on my stomach

trying to calm myself down from severe ptsd [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]."

Her string of tweets ends with her explaining how she left the man's home that morning when he was naked and asleep. "I escaped from the house and started walking from Richview Road to anywhere else … Literally wearing this man's clothes right now DNA [Deoxyribonucleic acid] all over me because I couldn't locate his house the moment, I called the police because I couldn't see." (Earlier in the thread, Salau [Toyin] explains that she has complications with eyesight). [2]

On June 13, 2020, the police found Oluwatoyin Salau's murdered body. The rape and murder of Toyin, a nineteen-year-old Black, cis-gendered, African-descended woman, illustrates how race, rape, and religion can collide in cases of sexual assault and femicide. The intersection and marginal factors of being an African-descended female who trusted a supposedly religious Black man and was then raped and murdered by him are tragic. The tragic death of Toyin poses bigger questions about gender-based violence (GBV) on Black college and university campuses and those prepared to intervene and prevent such senseless harm and death. Considering the extent of the problem of GBV on Black college campuses, this article wonders what role did historical Black colleges and universities (HBCU) chaplains play in preventing and intervening in sexual assault and femicide during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown? I use a case study approach to argue that the positionality of a HBCU chaplain is pivotal to preventing and intervening in GBV on their campuses.[3] By case study, I mean the description and analysis of the life and work of a particular individual in a particular context and

[2] Fabiola Cineas, "The disappearance and death of activist Oluwatoyin Salau, explained," July 16, 2022, *Vox*. Accessed March 13, 2024 https://www.vox.com/2020/6/16/21292237/oluwatoyin-salau-death There was a link embedded in the text of Cineas's news article with Toyin's tweets. However, the link is no longer available for my analysis of her words. Thus, by quoting the entire newspaper article, I provide a secondary source of interpretation of Toyin's tweets. The body of seventy-five-year-old Victoria Sims, a white community volunteer, was found dead near Toyin's body. Police speculate that the suspected murderer, forty-nine-year-old Aaron Glee, knew Sims from her volunteer work and may have located Toyin with Sims' help.

[3] Chaplain and campus minister are synonymous in this essay and used interchangeably.

bounded by specific parameters.[4] In this article, I offer an in-depth study of Rev. Scriven and her pastoral intervention practices with HBCU students who had been raped or whom she deemed to be at risk of sexual assault, intimate partner violence (IPV), intimate partner aggression (IPA), and femicide during the period before and during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown from 2020 to 2022. The primary source of data for this case study is a series of interviews with Rev. Scriven that begun in September 2020. Though I began the interviews via Zoom, more recently, we continued our "conversations" via phone text messages, voice phone conversations, and email exchanges. along with an additional Zoom session. Rev. Scriven has asked that her real name and identity be revealed in this essay as an act of advocacy not only on behalf of young women on HBCU campuses but of all women and girls who are vulnerable to sexual assault or any other forms of GBV.[5]

Among the places that African-descended women and girls sheltered during the COVID-19 pandemic were dormitories and university-owned apartments or residences, often because they had no other place to go. That is to say, that many of them could not go home. Some of these properties were on the campuses of HBCUs. These institutions of higher education are explicitly for

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4 This definition and process of a case study approach is adapted from Creswell and Poth's conceptualization of case study research as a qualitative research method. See John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2018), 96–98.

5 The Southern Methodist University Institutional Review Board committee authorized the interviews used in this article as part of a larger research project for which I interviewed other college and university chaplains in the United States. Rev. Dr. Latricia Edwards Scriven signed and dated an informed consent form for these interviews. The research and writing of this essay are related to a larger research project on the role of religious leaders in preventing and intervening in youth/teen dating violence that I was fortunate to explore as a 2019 Fulbright Scholar, hosted by Professor Sarojini Nadar, Director of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town, South Africa. Professor Nadar, her Tutu Centre colleagues, Professor Miranda Pillay, and UWC students and faculty helped me conceive my ideas and pursue my qualitative approach on GBV and youth in violent romantic relationships. Both Professors Nadar and Pillay are members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in the South Africa chapter. My work in South Africa prepared me for research on youth in violent romantic relationships on college campuses in the US upon my return in 2020.

the purpose of educating African-descended young women and men and were established primarily during the Reconstruction period after the United States Civil War, during the early part of the nineteenth century. A few HBCUs were established prior to the US Civil War, including the oldest, Cheyney University in Pennsylvania, which was established in 1837.[6] They are owned either by state governments (land grant institutions) or various private nonprofit entities, including Black church denominations. Of the 101 HBCUs in existence today, the majority are in southern US states.[7] Sheltering in HBCU housing during the pandemic rendered college women more vulnerable to gender-based violence from partners of both heterosexual/binary and homosexual/nonbinary intimate partners or roommates.

Very quickly, administrators and faculty of HBCUs had to pivot not only to design and implement remote teaching and learning programs but also to secure housing for students who could not move back home. College chaplains were among the university personnel who played a part in securing the welfare of HBCU students during the COVID-19 shelter-in place period. Indeed, chaplains had a unique positionality for their transformative work on campuses,[8] as their position, power, and influence gave them particular authority to intervene in situations of lockdown intimate partner violence, intimate partner aggression, and femicide.

I come to this research as a cis-gendered female of African descent, whose parents bore and raised me in the southern US state of Mississippi. My maternal grandmother, Virgie Foster McNair, a farmer and teacher, nurtured my early childhood spiritual formation. During my elementary and high school years, my parents and a community of Black church folks and Black educators continued to nurture my spirituality as a seamless fabric of love for the secular and the sacred. Although now retired from a professorship of a theological education institution, I identify my sensibilities as a scholar and researcher as those of a womanist practical theologian concerned about

6 History of HBCUs, last modified February 27, 2024. Accessed March 18, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historically_black_colleges_and_universities.

7 History of HBCUs.

8 Carole Rushton, "Positionality." *Nursing Philosophy* 24, no. 4 (2023): e12415–e12415, https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12415. The definition of positionality in this article informs my method for developing this article.

lived religion and culture at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and other marginalizing and intersecting categories of African-descended young women and girls. My primary approach to understanding the lived religious experiences of young women and girls is through ethnographic approaches where I offset my power as researcher and interpreter of young women and girls' experiences with their own evaluation of what I have heard in interviews, seen in observations, analyzed from collected data, and written about in essays and books. I intentionally level my social and political position and the power that I wield with that of the power of research participants, who edit what I hear and write about them. Thus, my positionality is, at least to some extent, balanced by the positionality of the participants.[9]

I approach my research with a dearth of publications, especially peer-reviewed articles, available to me on the topic of sexual assault on HBCU campuses. However, I hope that this article will spark more interest in research and publications on sexual violence on HBCU campuses with a view towards ending the violence.

Essential Concepts and Terms

Six important concepts ground my research: positionality, gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, intimate partner aggression, femicide, and chaplain. Being central to this article, they thus warrant definition.
First, "positionality"[10] is a concept that foregrounds a person's subjectivity and identity while avoiding hegemony and essentialization, particularly that of women:

> Positionality is the social and political context that creates your identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status.

[9] My reflections on my own positionality are influenced by Andrea L. Dottolo and Sarah M. Tillery, "Reflexivity and research: Feminist interventions and their practical implications" in *Reflexivity and international relations: Positionality, critique, and practice*, eds. J. L. Amoreaux and B. J. Steele (New York: Routledge, 2015), 123–41. Accessed March 9, 2024. DOI:10.4324/9781315765013-7

[10] Alcoff, Linda. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

> Positionality also describes how your identity influences, and potentially biases, your understanding of and outlook on the world.[11]

In the context of this research, I understand it as the social and political position of an HBCU chaplain or campus minister and the nature of their power. The positionality of a HBCU chaplain as "subject" is the result of authorization and review by the HBCU chaplain in this project to name her identity so that the researcher will avoid objectification of her identity. Said another way, the HBCU chaplain in this case study reviewed the content of my description and analysis of her positionality and agreed that it represented her accurately.

The positionality of nurses also informs my use of positionality for college and university chaplains.[12] In her essay, Carole Rushton considers positionality in regards to how and from where nurses construct meanings for themselves in their professional relationships, and how they act out of their meaning-making to shape practices and policies in the places where they work.[13] Rushton uses Linda Alcoff's idea of positionality as more appropriate for her argument about the advocacy of nurses because it "displaces hegemony and binarity of agency verses structure, essentialism and oppressive, omnipotent conceptualizations of power intrinsic to prevailing constructions of the nurse identity".[14] Instead, positionality assumes the multiple and diverse identity of nurses formed within contexts of oppressive and liberating power networks. Rushton's essay offers a template for understanding the identity, influence, and power of chaplains, particularly African-descended chaplains on HBCU campuses.

In this sense, positionality grounds this essay methodologically as I describe chaplaincy work of intervening and preventing intimate partner violence (IPV) in a particular case study on an HBCU campus and as I draw implications for positionality of African-descended chaplains on HBCU campuses to practice prevention and intervention of IPV. I present a case study description and analysis followed by a suggestion of what that case

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11 Dictionary.com, Accessed March 6, 2024 https://www.dictionary.com/e/positionality/
12 Rushton, "Positionality," 1.
13 Rushton, "Positionality," 1.
14 Rushton, "Positionality," 2.

study infers for an Africana[15] chaplaincy, a goal of which is ending sexual violence against HBCU Black students.

Second, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, GBV is defined as:

> any form of violence against an individual based on biological sex, gender identity or expression, or perceived adherence to socially defined expectations of what it means to be a man or woman, boy or girl. This includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether in public or private life. Additionally, GBV is rooted in gender-related power differences.[16]

The CDC joins with the World Health Organization (WHO) to address this global health problem.

Third, intimate partner violence (IPV), is defined as "abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship".[17] The term "intimate partner" refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners and includes both heterosexual and homosexual partners. Forms of IPV include physical, sexual, stalking, and psychological aggression. The frequency and severity of these forms vary.

Fourth, intimate partner aggression (IPA) is related to psychological aggression of an intimate partner that uses "verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to harm a partner mentally or emotionally

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15 Ericka Shawndricka Dunbar. *Trafficking Hadassah : Collective Trauma, Cultural Memory, and Identity in the Book of Esther and in the African Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 14. Dunbar writes: "When I refer to Africana girls and women, I refer to the collective communities of girls and women located on the continent of Africa, and/or who descend from them, and/or who have been displaced from the continent through the transatlantic slave trade or voluntary and involuntary migration." I adopt this same position.

16 "*Ending Gender-based Violence Globally*," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Global Health, last modified November 21, 2023, Accessed March 7, 2024. https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/topics/gbv/.

17 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

and/or to exert control over a partner".[18] In the United States, 70% to 90% of all IPA occurs in dating relationships. It is facilitated more aggressively by technology and noted as "cyber-IPA", so-called because it occurs through social media, email, and text messages.[19]

The fifth term essential to this essay is femicide, which "is generally understood to involve intentional murder of women because they are women, but broader definitions include any killings of women or girls".[20] Feminicide highlights the misogynous murder of women in contexts where economic factors that include poverty, work, and patriarchal policing intersect and materialize in the killing of women and girls. The history of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, Central America, where thousands of women have been brutally killed, has influenced the conceptualization of this term.[21]

Finally, an HBCU chaplain is considered the religious leader primarily responsible for the spiritual formation, pastoral care, and moral aptitude of all multi-faith and non-faith students and other persons in the greater campus community.[22] Frederick T. Faison provides this definition of the HBCU chaplain in his Doctor of Education (EdD) dissertation titled "The Role and Relevance of the Black College and University Chaplain". Faison indicates that all college and university chaplains generally work under the auspices of the student affairs administration, or the presidential administration, or as faculty.[23] Faison serves under the authority of the Student Success Division and has oversight of the Mary Dod Brown

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18 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

19 Julia F Hammett, Brennah V. Ross, Anna Peddle, Anna E. Jaffe, Jennifer C. Duckworth, Jessica A. Blayney, and Cynthia A. Stappenbeck. "Associations Among Emotion Regulation, COVID Stress, Alcohol Use, and Intimate Partner Aggression Among College Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Family Violence*, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00601-y.

20 "*Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women: Femicide,"* World Health Organization, last modified September 29, 2012. Accessed March 7, 2024. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-RHR-12.38.

21 Dana A. Meredith, and Luis Alberto Rodríguez Cortés. "Feminicide: Expanding Outrage: Representations of Gendered Violence and Feminicide in Mexico." In *Modern Mexican Culture: Critical Foundations*, (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2017) 237.

22 Frederick T. Faison, "The Role and Relevance of the Historically Black College and University Chaplain." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2017, 1, 109–112.

23 Faison, "Role and Relevance," 20.

Memorial Chapel and Health and Wellness at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. While not evident in Faison's dissertation or available literature that he reviews, HBCU chaplains may also address the many manifestations of sexual assault of students. Responsibility for the involvement of chaplains in sexual assault cases may be determined by a college administrator, such as a dean of students, student affairs officer, or even the HBCU president. Faison may or may not have worked with victims of sexual assault in the Health and Wellness department of the Student Success Division.

The concept of a HBCU chaplain is the starting point for this case study of Rev. Dr. Latricia Scriven, an HBCU chaplain (also known as campus minister) who has worked to address IPV. Her positionality, I argue, is a model for chaplains to practice intervention and prevention of sexual violence on HBCU campuses.

Positionality of a HBCU Chaplain/Campus Minister: Rev. Dr. Latricia Edwards Scriven

"Mama" is the moniker that Florida A&M University (FAMU) students use for Rev. Dr. Latricia Edwards Scriven. Young African Americans use it as a term of endearment when they like and trust an adult. At first, Rev. Scriven did not appreciate the term. She would rather have been called "Auntie", another term of endearment, but "Mama" is understood as being the highest honor, as she well knew. She sighed, and commented that "Mama" came with so much expectation.

Rev. Latricia Scriven is a cis-gender female of African descent. She is a wife and mother of three adult children. She was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA and, hence, was "shaped by all that comes with being a southern gurl!!!".

Rev. Scriven is a clergywoman with a Bachelors in Mathematics and Masters in Mathematics Education. She earned a doctorate in Educational Studies from Purdue University. Upon graduation from Purdue, she received a Masters of Divinity from The Interdenominational Theological Center, Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, GA, where she concentrated in Biblical Studies (Hebrew Bible). She was valedictorian for both her

Bachelors and Masters of Divinity degrees. Her academic training has afforded her the opportunity to be an adjunct mathematics teacher at FAMU. Students know her as a campus minister as well as a university professor. Teaching has also enabled her to build relationships among FAMU faculty and administrators. She is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church and serves as a campus minister among several other campus ministers. While she has preached and served as a worship leader for several university events, she was not afforded the authority of being the only chaplain on campus, as is the practice of some HBCU schools. She has served on numerous FAMU committees and boards that affirm her gifts and abilities as a university teacher, administrator, and minister.

Rev. Scriven credits her ability to serve in many capacities on FAMU's campus to the relationships that she fostered among students, faculty, and administrators. Scriven said, "I was willing to be in relationship with students, building relationships of trust". She did so by being available to listen to students, be honest with them, and accept them unconditionally. She and her husband welcomed students, as well as faculty, staff, and administrators, into their home for food and fun, which no doubt fostered those "relationships of trust" with the FAMU community. Relationships of trust, Scriven emphasized, are central to constructing her positionality.
Rev. Scriven's positionality as an HBCU chaplain—her non-essentialized identity at the intersection of race, gender, class, sexuality, sociopolitical, and sociocultural context—includes trustworthiness, influence, and power. These three aspects of Scriven's positionality were instrumental in the prevention and intervention of IPV and femicide on campus during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When I first interviewed her in September 2020, Scriven was the pastor of the New Life United Methodist Church in Tallahassee, Florida, and the pastor and director of IMPACT@FAMU, that is the Wesley Foundation at Florida A&M University also in Tallahassee. The Wesley Foundation is the umbrella name for all United Methodist Church campus ministries that own and financially support IMPACT@FAMU. Governed in partnership with FAMU, Rev. Scriven served as the pastor and director of IMPACT@FAMU from 2014 to 2022, functioning as chaplain to FAMU students who chose to

participate in programs and services at IMPACT@FAMU,[24] which functions much like other student-serving organizations and is an affiliate organization of FAMU with a faculty sponsor. As a land grant, state-owned HBCU, FAMU does not have a university chaplain but, instead, affiliates with ministers from various religious organizations, like IMPACT@FAMU Wesley Foundation, that provide chaplaincy services for their students.

During Scriven's eight years of service at FAMU with IMPACT@FAMU Wesley Foundation, she taught Bible study, led worship services, and hosted retreats and other programs despite having no permanent building to call their own. She talked about her experience reserving classrooms and other gathering spaces to convene meetings and host guests, only to discover on numerous occasions that her group had been locked out. On some occasions, her group would convene outside the building instead of spending time trying to find someone with a key. Some of these programs were hosted by New Life UMC, her parish appointment. New Life UMC was where FAMU Black Lives Matter students organized protest activities after the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 where, for example, they had the space to prepare food.

Rev. Scriven came to know Toyin, the FAMU BLM femicide victim discussed earlier, from the students Toyin confided in about being raped by her Black, male roommate. After several conversations with Toyin, Scriven discovered that Toyin believed that God wanted her to forgive her rapist because he was "her brother", a fellow human being. Scriven helped Toyin understand the fallacy of her belief and how a loving God does not hold her accountable for her rapist's actions. She helped Toyin find more permanent housing with another student over their two-day interaction. When Scriven learned that another rapist had killed Toyin, just when she had just found refuge from her previous rapist, she was heartbroken and dismayed, to say the least.

Toyin had clearly trusted Rev. Scriven with her history of sexual abuse because her BLM activist friends had told Toyin that being sexually abused by a roommate is not acceptable and had likewise trusted Rev. Scriven

[24] The UMC Florida Conference appointed Rev. Scriven as senior pastor of St. Paul's UMC in Tallahassee, FL during the annual conference in June 2022 after the tragic death of Toyin on June 6, 2022.

enough to call her and ask if she would speak with Toyin. Rev. Scriven did indeed talk with Toyin and, upon hearing Toyin justify her rapist's actions, told her that it was not OK, then helped Toyin get out of the situation and move out of the house with a police escort that same day. Toyin was safe from her sexually abusive male roommate for two days before she disappeared, abducted by someone else, and found dead seven days later. In a conversation with God, Rev. Scriven said, "God, I can't imagine that you brought this person to cross my path and this has happened. Something must come out of this other than a murder situation".

Later, she was asked to speak at a public event about Toyin's murder where one of her Black female students was in the audience. The news about Toyin's experience had resulted in that student seeking Scriven out for help. A married clergyman was harassing the female student and threatening to get her fired from her job and expose her if she did not consent to being sexually intimate with him. The student had been a victim of rape, and the married clergyman, knowing this, used this information to berate her and make her feel worthless. Consequently, the student had attempted suicide, believing there was no way out of her situation. Indeed, the married clergyman was exerting his power to control the student and make her believe that her only option was to concede and be sexually intimacy with him. Rev. Scriven supported the student in getting counseling and care and bringing legal charges against the clergyman. The case was being litigated when we spoke in September 2020. When he realized that he no longer held power over the student, the clergyman filed a restraining order against her, as if he was the victim.

Rev. Scriven attributes this student's trust in her to her intentional relationship building efforts with students in general. She welcomed all students, without conditions, stereotypes, or assumptions, to IMPACT@FAMU Wesley Foundation and New Life UMC. Now, as then, she balances her position as a clergywoman, "a woman of the collar", and the respect and power it wields with compassion and care, so much so that students call her Mama. Recall that she and her husband, a college professor, fostered trust among the students, faculty, and administrators primarily through their hospitality. As Rev. Scriven knows, good relationships yield trust, and she works hard to foster both.

Trustworthiness is yet another aspect of Rev. Scriven's positionality. Positionality is a subjective non-essentialized construct of identity that gives regard to context while also considering the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability that shape meaning-making and actions that usher from that meaning-making. Knowing one's positionality enables one to think critically and constructively about oppressive situations and develop practices and policy to alleviate oppression.[25] For Scriven, that trustworthiness enables her to advocate on behalf of her students, specifically in cases of sexual abuse and sexual harassment as noted above. Students trust her to hear their concerns, free from judgement, on a campus that some students deem to have "a rape culture". The students trusted her to help Toyin and, due to their endorsement, Toyin also trusted Rev. Scriven. As a trustworthy chaplain, Rev. Scriven gave Toyin courage, not only to share that a male roommate had raped her, but also to leave their shared house immediately with a police escort that Rev. Scriven had arranged.

Moreover, trustworthiness leads to influence, another aspect of Rev. Scriven's positionality that enables her to prevent and intervene in situations of sexual assault. Influence means Scriven can shape students' behavior and opinions because they trust her. Among the many sermons that she has preached, she noted that her favorite is the story of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19. When she preaches from this text in her congregation, she asks women to share their experiences of sexual assault: "More than half of the women willingly give their testimony". When she teaches Bible Study at IMPACT @FAMU, her favorite session is titled "Sex, Love, and Don't Forget the Glove". She has taught Bible study to students from Judges 11, the exploitation of Jephthah and his exploitation of his unnamed daughter. Another favorite for Bible study is the story of Hagar in Genesis and how Abram (later Abraham) raped her.

Through her preaching and teaching, Rev. Scriven has influenced FAMU students to think critically about the Bible and their own identity and agency. Her Bible study classes consistently draw between 25 and 35 Christian, Muslim, and non-religious-affiliated students. Her husband is present to

[25] Rushton, "Positionality."

model how cis-gendered males can approach the topic of rape and sexual abuse seriously. She has influenced students to come out to her about their sexuality as well as to confide in her about being sexually abused. In other words, influence is an aspect of Rev. Scriven's positionality.

Together, trustworthiness and influence result in a transformative power that shapes policy to prevent and intervene in IPV and IPA on an HBCU campus. While this worthy ideal was not Rev. Scriven's experience at FAMU, she did initiate securing land and building a house and movable tent to serve the students at IMPACT@FAMU Wesley Foundation. Erected between 2022 and 2023, the house provides space for students to gather for Bible study, guest lectures, and presentations, and has a kitchen in which they can prepare meals. Most importantly, the house has living quarters for students in need of emergency housing, like students fleeing situations of IPV or sexual assault.[26] In short, the positionality and power of an HBCU chaplain can shape policy on GBV on campus.

Future Work on the Positionality of HBCU Chaplains

How might this power be used to save the lives of potential victims of GBV on HBCU campuses? I conclude by suggesting future work for preventing and intervening in sexual violence on HBCU campuses. First, we need more research on GBV, IPV, and IPA on HBCU campuses, examining the historical, social, political and economic contexts. The Centers for Disease Control provides definitions and statistics on IPV on college campuses, but the data refers to general populations of college students and includes nothing specific about HBCU campuses. The American Psychological Association offers similar types of facts but uses categories under the heading of "marginalized populations" that merely suggests at African-descended college students. The APA category of "intersectionality" means "to encompass one's unique identities (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, etc.".[27] The point of intersectionality is illustrated

[26] Video of IMPACT@FAMU Wesley Foundation Accessed March 29, 2024, https://famuwesley.org/our-story.

[27] Stephanie Miodus, Samantha Tan, Nicole D. Evangelista, Cynthia Fioriti, and Monique Harris, with Contributions by the APAGS Advocacy Coordinating Team, "Campus Sexual Assault: Fact Sheet from an Intersectional Lens." *American Psychological Association*, updated June 2023, https://www.apa.org/apags/resources/campus-sexual-assault-fact-sheet, 2Accessed March 29, 2024

with an example, that "transgender People of Color are more likely to experience sexual assault than transgender White students".[28] Fact sheets are a good starting point for more research about sexual assault on HBCU campuses. However, the sexual assault of poor, Black binary or nonbinary students needs attention. Research that intentionally addresses these intersections is vital. Most importantly, this research must be correlated with persons who are positioned to advocate on behalf of victims of sexual assault, which would include HBCU chaplains.

Second, the research must give attention to the role that the patriarchy plays in GBV on HBCU campuses. Patriarchy, writes Miranda Pillay, powers the heinous activities of GBV; patriarchy is "male rule, male headship, and androcentrism".[29] It is the lived belief among all genders and sexualities that maleness is normative. The patriarchy dominates thinking and action in culture and religion. Indeed, patriarchal beliefs and practices are internalized in women and girls who apologize for men's egregious acts of rape and murder of women simply because they are male. Recall that Toyin in the case study above felt the need to forgive her Black male roommate who raped her. Toyin's words are an example of internalized patriarchy, coupled with her religious beliefs. Research on the nature and role of the patriarchy in HBCU rape culture holds promise for broader understanding of the patriarchy as a frame of meaning or meaning-system for African descended, binary and nonbinary, poor, and religious students.

The patriarchy also connects to IPA. Research is also needed to understand the nature and prevalence of this form of violence. While it is akin to cyber bullying, IPA is not cyber bullying. Specific research questions about race, gender, class, and other marginalizing factors regarding IPA is needed. Like other research on GBV and IPV, the existing literature does not focus on the problem of IPA on HBCU campuses.

Third, more religious and theological education for chaplains is needed, specifically for HBCU chaplains who are called to minister Africans and

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28 Stephanie Miodus, et al, "Campus Sexual Assault," 2.

29 Miranda Pillay, "The Anglican Church and Feminism: Challenging 'the Patriarchy of Our Faith'" *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa*, 2013, 19 (2) 57.

African American students within the historical context of enslavement and dehumanization by white supremacist structures. HBCU chaplains minister to students whose forebears were enslaved and dehumanized by white supremacist institutions, and whose present world continues to oppress them. Such imperial structures, one can hypothesize, are also the source of generational trauma that can lead to black-on-black sexual assault. I argue that students and chaplains (along with university leaders and administrators) would benefit from further education about the history of rape among enslaved persons in North America. What were the consequences for Black persons who raped another person, or even those who were alleged to have raped another? How is religion entangled in the history of rape among African-descended people?

Chaplaincy education in theological education is usually categorized under Pastoral Care and Counseling courses in the larger area of Pastoral Theology. These courses usually focus on pastoral care for congregations and hospital chaplaincy. However, there are a number of chaplaincy positions that merit specific educational training, among them military, industrial, and college and university chaplaincy, all of which could benefit from units that focus on sexual violence. Chaplaincy clinical training would provide additional needed focus on sexual assault on college campuses and emphasize intersectional marginalizing factors of students.

Fourth and finally, there is a need for future work on the positionality of HBCU chaplains on the topic of advocacy: the capacity to act on behalf of students so that they flourish as they matriculate in higher education. HBCU chaplains are uniquely positioned to foster flourishing students, and to protect their ability to do so by shaping and implementing policy on rape culture on campus, due to their religious and theological training and the very nature of their office.

The example of Chaplain Scriven hints at what is possible through further research and education of HBCU chaplains, whereby their advocacy can aid students in ways that support the flourishing of African descended students on HBCU campuses, whether during pandemics, after being raped, or simply when being away from home for the first time.

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The Domination of Mother Earth, Gender-Based Violence, and the (Dis)Ease of Eve

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SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

The misuse of religious texts, particularly the Genesis creation story, has historically been used to justify the exploitation of both the Earth and women. This justification, rooted in patriarchal interpretations of scripture, has led to environmental degradation and gender-based violence (GBV) and disproportionately affected marginalized communities, especially women of color. This article examines the interconnectedness of these issues, exploring how the domination of "Mother Earth" and the subjugation of women are intertwined. By analyzing the historical context, religious interpretations, and societal structures that perpetuate these forms of violence, this article aims to shed light on the urgent need for an intersectional approach to address both environmental destruction and GBV. Through a critical examination of the "(Dis)ease of Eve", this article challenges traditional narratives and seeks to reclaim the power and agency of women, particularly women of the African Diaspora, in the fight for a more just and sustainable future.

KEYWORDS
African Diaspora, Christianity, Ecology, GBV, Intersectionality, Mother Earth

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INTRODUCTION

The exploitation and abuse of women and the Earth have been deeply intertwined throughout history, often justified and perpetuated through the manipulation of religious texts and patriarchal interpretations. This interconnected violence, rooted in a dominator mindset, has manifested in environmental degradation, gender-based violence (GBV), and the marginalization of vulnerable communities, particularly women of color. This article delves into the historical and ongoing ramifications of this interconnected violence, exploring how the subjugation of "Mother Earth" mirrors and reinforces the oppression of women.

The Christian Doctrine of Discovery, stemming from a specific interpretation of Genesis, has played a pivotal role in legitimizing the exploitation of both people and the environment. This doctrine, rooted in a patriarchal worldview, has been used to justify colonization, resource extraction, and the erasure of indigenous knowledge systems. The objectification of nature as something to be conquered and controlled has paved the way for environmental destruction, including deforestation, pollution, and climate change. Simultaneously, this dominator mindset has fueled the subjugation of women, who have historically been viewed as part of the natural world, as things to be dominated and controlled by men. This patriarchal ideology has manifested in various forms of GBV, from physical and sexual abuse to economic exploitation and the denial of reproductive rights.

The consequences of this interconnected violence are far-reaching and devastating. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects marginalized communities, particularly women, who frequently experience the worst effects of climate change, such as food insecurity, water scarcity, and displacement. Moreover, the exploitation of natural resources often

leads to conflict and instability, further exacerbating GBV and creating a vicious cycle of violence and oppression. By examining the historical context, religious interpretations, and societal structures that perpetuate this interconnected violence, this article aims to expose the urgent need for an intersectional approach to address both environmental destruction and GBV. Through a critical analysis of the "(dis)ease of Eve," this article challenges traditional narratives and seeks to reclaim the power and agency of women in the fight for a more just and sustainable future.

MOTHER EARTH

> The command of God to Adam and Eve in Gen. 1:28-30 to have domination over creatures is problematic. In its original Hebrew, domination is a harsh word. It is to tame and control the forces of nature that are destructive and violent. Taken in isolation and purely in this context, that word gives a basis for a ruthless exploitation of nature.[1]

Mother Earth is our life force, essential for our existence. In the Black/African American community, mothers are considered sacred, providing life and nourishment. This concept extends to Mother Earth, who, like chlorophyll, can heal and restore humanity. Healing varies across species and communities. The term "Mother" encompasses various roles, from biological to adopted parents and caregivers. While Mother Earth sustains us, many humans harm her and each other.

Similarly, Mother Africa is yet another origin of landmasses: "Geographically, about 175,000,000 years ago, we find Africa at the center of the original supercontinent, a conglomerate land mass some geologists refer to as Pangaea, that places Africa in the center of the earth's four quadrants or all four hemispheres".[2] Furthermore, it is similarly considered as the origin of humankind on Earth:

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1 K. C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission*, 1st ed. (Christava Sahitya Samithi, 1996).

2 L. H. Whelchel, Jr, *The History and Heritage of African American Churches: A Way Out of No Way* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2011), 2.

> When tracing our African roots, we arrive at this inescapable conclusion: Out of Africa came all entries into the world. She is the [M]other of all that from which or in which or on which continent the human race, human civilization, and the foundations of religion were conceived and delivered into the world. Mother Africa is the term used to describe Africa and the "matrix" or "womb" from which all else concerning humanity developed.[3]

Evidence of her people's ancient travels exists worldwide, including pyramids and artefacts. However, Africa's dominance ended with Hannibal's defeat by the Romans, leading to European colonization and the suppression of African people, culture, and history.[4] This loss put Africa and her people on a new trajectory, one that saw European colonization of her lands, her people, sacred ways of life, their Deities, history, and her-stories.

The Doctrine of Discovery and Domination of Mother Earth

The Christian Doctrine of Discovery, rooted in a specific interpretation of Genesis, has historically been used to justify the exploitation of people and the environment and continues to have detrimental effects today. The Discovery Doctrine and subsequent papal decrees issued in the 15th century granted European Christian nations the right to claim and exploit non-Christian lands and people. This doctrine stemmed from a particular understanding of the Genesis creation story that emphasized human dominion over nature. Specifically, Gen. 1:28-30 provides humankind with wisdom and responsibilities:

> [28]God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." [29]God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the Earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. [30]And every beast of the Earth, and to everything that creeps on the Earth,

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3 Whelchel, *The History and Heritage of African American Churches*, 1.

4 Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, trans. Mercer Cook, 1st ed. (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1974), 118–19.

> everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

This analysis will not delve into the ongoing scholarly debates surrounding the interpretation of Genesis 1 and its implications for humanity's responsibility towards the environment and its inhabitants.

The Doctrine of Discovery led to the colonization of Africa and the Americas that also led to the enslavement and commercial exploitation of the indigenous populations.[5] According to Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature*, "as the economy became modernized and the Scientific Revolution proceeded, the dominion metaphor spread beyond the religious sphere and assumed ascendency in the social and political spheres as well".[6] It also fueled the objectification and exploitation of women, who were often seen as part of the natural world to be conquered.[7] Ecofeminist scholars like Vandana Shiva, Rosemary Ruether, and Val Plumwood argue that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are interconnected and religious texts have often been misused to justify both.[8] This perspective challenges the dominant anthropocentric and patriarchal worldview that has fueled environmental destruction and calls for a rethinking of our relationship with nature and a dismantling of oppressive systems.

The repercussions of the Doctrine of Discovery are still felt today. Environmental degradation, including global warming and resource

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5 Indigenous Values Initiative, "Dum Diversas," Doctrine of Discovery, July 23, 2018, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/dum-diversas/; The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, "The Doctrine of Discovery, 1493," accessed May 26, 2024, https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/doctrine-discovery-1493; Webfeller, "Romanus Pontifex (Granting the Portuguese a Perpetual Monopoly in Trade with Africa) January 8, 1455," *Papal Encyclicals Online* (blog), June 16, 2017, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/nichol05/romanus-pontifex.htm.

6 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, Reprint (New York: HarperOne, 1990).

7 Sally Roesch-Wagner, "Christian Control of Women and Mother Earth: The Doctrine of Discovery And The Doctrine of Male Domination," *Doctrine of Discovery* (blog), April 8, 2023, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/blog/christian-control-women-mother-earth/.

8 Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1988); Rosemary R. Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1994); Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002).

depletion, can be linked to the exploitative mindset it fosters. According to Maarten K. van Aalst, "the impacts of climate change on natural disasters,[and] the increase in greenhouse gases" are a precursor to global warming, and will lead to more droughts, tropical cyclones and floods.[9] Van Aalst reports a direct correlation between an increase between global climate changes and anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions over the last twenty years.[10] Another striking example is that 40% of the world's population suffers from water scarcity due to a lack of transboundary agreements, which is likely to increase in the future.

Furthermore, the doctrine's legacy continues to impact legal decisions, as evidenced by its use in a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court case to deny land rights to the Oneida Indian Nation.[11] This concept has had a substantial impact on the formation of our connection with the environment and indigenous peoples. Understanding both the historical and ongoing impact is crucial to address contemporary issues such as climate change and indigenous rights.

Epidemics and the Earth Crisis

Climate change and environmental degradation, particularly in Latin America, disproportionately affect women and can contribute to the spread of infectious diseases, potentially leading to global pandemics. It is these immediate and tangible consequences of "forced development or modernization projects" that feminists in the Global South prioritize over the more abstract and long-term threat of climate change. These projects displace women and have troubling effects on their livelihoods, particularly in Latin America concerning food production.[12] When the effects of environmental degradation lead to drought, food production is severely impacted, and public health epidemics reemerge.

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9 Maarten K. Van Aalst, "The Impacts of Climate Change on the Risk of Natural Disasters," *Disasters* 30, no. 1 (March 2006): 5–18, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2006.00303.x.

10 Van Aalst, "The Impacts of Climate Change," 5–18.

11 Roesch-Wagner, "Christian Control of Women And Mother Earth."

12 Melissa Moreano Venegas, Miriam Lang, and Gabriela Ruales-Jurado, "Climate Justice from the Perspective of Latin American and Other Southern Feminisms," *Fundación Rosa Luxemburg Oficina Región Andina* October, no. No. 20 (October 2021): 32.

Research suggests that global deforestation, another symptom of earth degradation, may lead a worldwide pandemic. In their article, Tulio de Oliveria and Houriiyah Tegally argue that the connection between climate change, earth degradation such as deforestation, and infectious disease has been grossly overlooked.[13] They contend that the displacement of humans, wildlife, insects and rodents due to climate change and the resultant natural disasters, such as floods and heatwaves, will spread pandemic-level infectious diseases to the human population. Coupled with rapid international travel, this type of disease could circulate the globe in hours.

Earth Crisis Theories and Perspectives

Contemporary scholarship on climate change is evolving to incorporate diverse perspectives, challenging traditional narratives, and highlighting the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, particularly Black women and African Americans. The reviewed texts offer a multi-faceted exploration of climate change discourse. Rahman traces the evolution of the conversation, noting a shift towards anthropocentric terminology while overlooking colonial implications.[14] Chisale advocates for an African women-centered approach to eco-theology, distinct from existing ecowomanist and ecofeminist frameworks.[15] Davidson and da Silva introduce a Black social thought perspective that confronts environmental collapse as an enduring reality rather than a redemptive event.[16] Thomas, through an Afro-Gothic lens, examines the Flint water crisis as an instance of domestic eco-terrorism, highlighting the intersection of environmental and human rights struggles rooted in the Black Atlantic experience. Together, these works

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13 Tulio de Oliveira and Houriiyah Tegally, "Will Climate Change Amplify Epidemics and Give Rise to Pandemics?," *Science* 381, no. 6660 (August 25, 2023): eadk4500, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adk4500.

14 Muhammad Ishaq-ur Rahman, "Climate Change: A Theoretical Review," *Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems* 11, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 1–13, https://doi.org/10.7906/indecs.11.1.1.

15 Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale and Rozelle Robson Bosch, eds., "When Women and Earth Connect: African Ecofeminist or Ecowomanist Theology?," in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Theology*, vol. 10, HTS Religion & Society Series (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2021), 9–17, https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2021.BK237.01.

16 Joe P. L. Davidson and Filipe Carreira da Silva, "Fear of a Black Planet: Climate Apocalypse, Anthropocene Futures and Black Social Thought," *European Journal of Social Theory* 25, no. 4 (November 1, 2022): 521–38, https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310211067980.

contribute to a growing body of literature that seeks to decolonize and diversify climate change discourse.[17]

What are creative responses to environmental degradation?

Creative responses to environmental degradation include recognizing and harnessing the emotional impact of ecological awareness (eco-anxiety) and valuing the untapped reservoir of knowledge held by Indigenous communities, offering potential pathways towards mitigation and adaptation. Charlie Kurth and Panu Pihkala discuss the importance of more research to learn how people are living with "eco-anxiety", which they see as related to living with knowledge of environmental degradation. In the co-authored article, "Eco-anxiety: What it is and why it matters", Kurth and Pihkala propose possible positive outcomes from recognizing eco-anxiety, seeing it as a sign of "moral attunement" with the implication that this may lead to more personal accountability for minimizing the human contributions to climate change.[18]

Lilian C. Siwila contends that "every form of knowledge, be it oral or written, needs to be recognized as truth that can be used in response to climate change" when interacting with the indigenous knowledge found within African societies. In her article, "An African Ecofeminist Appraisal of the Value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Responding to Environmental Degradation and Climate Change", Siwila argues that Indigenous people have faced "environmental destruction using their indigenous knowledge systems" and are an "untapped library" that has been overlooked in the search for ways to address environmental degradation.[19]

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17 Tashima Thomas, "An Ecocritical Look at Flint's Water Crisis and Afro-Gothic Liquidity," *Liquid Blackness* 6, no. 2 (October 1, 2022): 38–59, https://doi.org/10.1215/26923874-9930283.

18 Charlie Kurth and Panu Pihkala, "Eco-Anxiety: What It Is and Why It Matters," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (September 23, 2022): 981814, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.981814.

19 Lilian Siwila, "An African Ecofeminist Appraisal of the Value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Responding to Environmental Degradation and Climate Change," in *African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2022), 65–78, https://www.academia.edu/93460679/An_African_ecofeminist_appraisal_of_the_value_of_indigenous_knowledge_systems_in_responding_to_environmental_degradation_and_climate_change.

Ecological Connections to GBV

The exploitation of both women and the Earth, historically justified by religious interpretations like the Doctrine of Discovery, has far-reaching consequences. Environmental degradation, fueled by this exploitative mindset, disproportionately affects marginalized communities, particularly women. This degradation exacerbates existing inequalities and contributes to the spread of infectious diseases and potential pandemics. As we confront the intensifying climate crisis, it is imperative to acknowledge these interconnected injustices and amplify the voices of those most affected, particularly Black women and indigenous communities, in shaping sustainable solutions.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is deeply rooted in patriarchal systems, religious interpretations, and historical injustices, disproportionately affects women and girls, necessitating an intersectional approach that considers the intertwined nature of various oppressions while focusing on community healing, individual agency, and empowerment to dismantle these harmful structures. It manifests in multiple forms of abuse, including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic, and can occur in both public and private spheres.[20]

This violence is further compounded by intersectional factors such as race, class, and gender identity, creating unique vulnerabilities and barriers to accessing justice and support for marginalized groups. For instance, transwomen of color often face additional bias and discrimination, hindering their access to protection and resources.[21] A womanist lens of GBV emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical context, the role of intersectionality, and the significance of community healing and empowerment for survivors. A comprehensive approach is needed to tackle

[20] Benjamin Loyseau, "Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)," UNHCR Israel, accessed May 23, 2024, https://www.unhcr.org/il/en/protection/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-sgbv.

[21] "United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally 2022," 2022 Update (U.S. Department of State, 2022), 8, https://www.state.gov/reports/united-states-strategy-to-prevent-and-respond-to-gender-based-violence-globally-2022/.

structural disparities and empower individuals to dismantle the systems that perpetuate violence against women and girls.

The Root of Gender-Based Violence

Religious texts can have a complex impact on GBV. While many teachings advocate for love and respect, specific interpretations have been misused to justify violence against women across various religions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism, where passages from sacred texts or religious traditions have been twisted to support patriarchal control and male dominance. In the Christian context, one such example is Ephesians 5:22–24, which instructs wives to submit to their husbands, often allowing for situations of GBV and unequal treatment in the marriage to occur. In the Qur'an 4:34 it states, "Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth".[22] This sacred text suggests that women are devoutly obedient to their husbands.

However, not to honor the role of the husband can have consequences such as the withholding of sex, striking, and other forms of physical violence. In the Hindu faith tradition, legal texts justified the subjugation of women to male authority from birth to death. Thus, within a hierarchal gender relationship, violence against women is considered the norm. In the Judaism tradition, Old Testament scriptures include displays of GBV, such as in Genesis 19:8. Misinterpretations of these texts can then manifest in harmful practices like that of honor killings, victim-blaming, and the silencing of survivors. In addition, they perpetuate inequality by denying women education and financial autonomy, consequently trapping them in abusive situations.

To counter these harmful interpretations, women religious scholars are reinterpreting texts to uncover overlooked perspectives and emphasize a holistic understanding that upholds the equality and dignity of all individuals. They advocate for the application of the universal principle of the Golden Rule, that is treating others with compassion and respect, and using human rights as a guiding framework to challenge discriminatory beliefs and

[22] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1998), 57.

policies. By promoting interpretations based in equality and prioritizing human rights, religious communities can actively work towards dismantling the harmful structures contributing to GBV and fostering a more equitable and just society for all.

Patriarchal Roots and the Historical Oppression of Women

At the core of violence against women is the patriarchy, a system of male domination based on perceived male superiority. This historical influence permeates religious practices, cultural norms, and societal expectations regarding women's roles, often normalizing violence against them as an expression of male control. The United Nations defines violence against women broadly, encompassing physical, sexual, and psychological harm, threats, coercion, and deprivation of liberty occurring in both public and private spheres.

Moreover, the unique experiences of Black women in the Americas illustrate the intersection of GBV and systemic racism, slavery, and colonization. Addressing GBV requires acknowledging and dismantling these social injustices to achieve meaningful change. Patricia Hill Collins argues:

> The experiences of women of color have been shaped and constrained by unique barriers, stemming from the combined effects of racial, ethnic, and gender bias. As a result, they have faced dehumanizing racial and ethnic stereotypes that have devalued their worth, oversexualized their bodies, and fueled a societal hierarchy that too often has deemed them as not measuring up to the perceived feminine superiority of white women.[23]

The Intersectional Nature of Gender-Based Violence

An intersectional lens reveals that GBV is intrinsically linked to other forms of oppression, including racism, classism, ableism, and more. This framework highlights how these various oppressions converge and amplify the prevalence, nature, and societal response to violence. Women's experiences of violence are not uniform but, rather, are shaped by their

[23] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 2000).

diverse intersecting identities. Transgender women of color, for instance, encounter unique obstacles in accessing support services compared to cisgender white women.

Individuals facing multiple oppressions often experience more severe and frequent violence due to the cumulative impact of these inequalities. For example, women with disabilities face compounded disadvantages due to income inequality and discrimination. Additionally, language barriers, cultural stigmas, and systemic discrimination hinder access to essential resources for many survivors. By understanding the complex interplay of intersectionality and GBV, we can develop more nuanced, inclusive, and practical strategies to prevent violence and support survivors across diverse communities and identities.

Community and Healing

Ending GBV requires a fundamental shift in societal attitudes that recognizes women's equality and values their contributions. Addressing GBV necessitates acknowledging the strength and resilience of survivors while providing comprehensive support networks and culturally-relevant resources and promoting self-care practices. Healing from the trauma of GBV necessitates trauma-informed approaches in support services that are sensitive to the unique needs of each survivor. Creating brave and safe spaces allows survivors to feel validated, empowered, and in control of their healing journey.

Holistic healing practices are essential to addressing the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of survivors. Integrating mental health support, art therapy, meditation, yoga, and other modalities can cater to the individual needs of each survivor. Community-based networks, such as peer support groups and survivor-led initiatives, foster connection and solidarity among survivors. These networks provide invaluable resources, validation, and a sense of belonging that facilitates healing and recovery.

Empowering Women's Agency to Combat GBV

To dismantle the deeply entrenched social injustices that perpetuate GBV, it is crucial to empower women by equipping them with the tools to recognize the subtle and overt practices, symptoms, and systemic forces that enable this violence. Amplifying women's voices, centering their experiences, and

fostering their leadership are essential to developing practical solutions and strategies to combat GBV. This violence comprises of more than physical abuse, including sexual assault, emotional manipulation, economic exploitation, and other forms of harm that reinforce patriarchal power structures as well. Dismantling GBV necessitates a multi-faceted approach that integrates activism, community engagement, policy reform, and cultural transformation. Through the acts of questioning and destroying the fundamental systems that sustain acts of violence towards women, we can establish a society in which all individuals can flourish without experiencing fear or injury.

THE (DIS)EASE OF EVE

> [26]Let us make Adam in our image, according to our likeness; [27]...male and female [the Divine] created them. [28]God blessed them... [31]God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:26-27, 31)

I am the Mother[24] of land and humankind, stripped from the memories of many of my children, many of whom still seek me! Only to discover I am already within them. I did not leave you. I am in your DNA. I am the hurricanes that leaves the coast of West Africa, following the paths of the ships that took your African forebears. Children do not cry; do not fear. I cry because you are the light, so shine bright. I am wisdom, the oceans blue, the Mother Land, and I am Mother, Africa.

When the Earth was only one landmass, Pangea[25], the continent now known as Africa was at the center, of all other landmasses (her children): North America, Central America, South America, Antarctica, Australia, and the peninsular formation of Asia currently known as Europe. Each shifted and moved away from Africa.[26] Geneticists, archaeologists, and paleontologists have confirmed that modern humans originated in Africa. Studies of

[24] Mother is capitalized to denote the honor and sacredness and to hold and reclaim Black women's significance in history, to our families, our communities, to one another, and to ourselves. Mother is not limited to those that have given birth, includes those that have protected, helped, and uplifted others and our communities.

[25] "What Was Pangea?" U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), accessed May 24, 2024, https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-was-pangea#.

[26] Whelchel, *The History and Heritage of African American Churches*, 2.

mitochondrial DNA support this conclusion. Geneticist L. Luca Cavalli-Forza also found that Africans exhibit the greatest genetic diversity among any human group, further supporting the idea that Africa is the cradle of humankind.[27]

She brought forth Eve, Mother of All Living (Genesis 3:20)[28], including Black women in the Diaspora. Thus, as an African American, a Black woman, a descendant of Enslaved Ancestors from the Mother Land, an African ascendant[29] from the Igbo people of Nigeria, the Mbundu people in Angola, the Temne people of Sierra Leone, the Tsogo people in Gabon, and ancient people of Ancient Near East, the lands that are currently identified as the Middle East, the first recorded GBV via spiritual-abuse and pandemic, occurs in the traditional (mis)interpretation of the Biblical text, Genesis 3, the Fall narrative, and the (dis)ease of Eve.

I Am Eve, and This Is My Story

I am Not your Whore! I am Not your Bitch! I am Not Angry! I am Not Common! I am Not the originator of Sin! These labels do women, in particular contemporary Black women[30] a disservice, are disturbing, and do not reflect who Black women are or who I am. I am a Black woman! An African American[31] woman! An African woman, I am The Mother of All Living! I am Eve! And this is my story![32]

The narrative of Eve as the "sin catalyst" in the Garden of Eden, referred to here as the "(Dis)ease of Eve", requires a critical reevaluation of Genesis 3 through both a historical and cultural lens. Biases and inconsistencies within

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27 Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *Dark Mother: African Origins and Godmothers* (San Jose, CA: Authors Choice Press, 2001), 6.

28 Michael C. Campbell and Sarah A. Tishkoff, "The Evolution of Human Genetic and Phenotypic Variation in Africa," *Current Biology* 20, no. 4 (February 23, 2010): R166–73, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2009.11.050.

29 See definition of "African ascendant" in the section "Genesis 3" of this article.

30 For this essay, Black women, are contemporary women with black skin, an African ascendant (see footnote 5), who are impacted by the Eve story.

31 African American women and Black women who are direct descendants of free Blacks or Blacks held in bondage in the United States of America during the 1400s – 1860s.

32 Burdette Lowe, "Rev. Burdette Lowe, 'The Domination of Mother Earth, Gender-Based Violence, and the Dis-Ease of Eve', co-authored paper presented at Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians Sixth Pan-African Conference, Ghana, West Africa, July 1-5, 2024.

Western education and historical narratives demand a closer examination of the information presented as factual. This section of the article delves into Christianity, Genesis 3, and the "(Dis)ease of Eve" from historical and theological perspectives, challenging the traditional Western portrayal of Eve, Black women, and women in general as the originators of "sin."

Merlin Stone aptly observes that "[t]he image of Eve, created for her husband, from her husband, the woman who was supposed to have brought the downfall of humankind, has in many ways become the image of all women".[33] This article argues that the "(Dis)ease of Eve", the perceived imbalance introduced into the world, stems from the misrepresentation of a sacred female figure. Traditionally, Eve is often depicted as a non-melanated female, despite interpretations of biblical and historical texts that suggest otherwise.[34] This racialized portrayal contributes to the marginalization of Black women and reinforces harmful stereotypes about women in general. Scientists reluctantly call the common maternal ancestor of all humans "Eve" because the name has misleading connotations. This Eve was likely a black-skinned woman who lived in Africa 200,000 years ago. DNA evidence traces all humans back to her. Moreover, Africa is the only place with evidence of humans living over a million years ago, as evidenced by the 3-million-year-old Lucy skeleton.[35]

In her work *Dark Mother: African Origins and Godmothers*, Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum in alignment with scholars from various nations presenting at a 1999 symposium ''Arte preistorica e tribale. Decifrare le immagini,' the XVII Valcamonica Symposium, held September 21 to 26 in Darfo Boario Terme, Italia, affirm the African Eve theory of human origins[36]:

> At the beginning of the third millennium, world scientists are in agreement on the african [sic] origin of modern humans—homo

[33] Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), xi.

[34] For example, some scholars argue that the Hebrew word for Eve, "Havvah," is connected to the word for "life" or "living," suggesting a connection to African origins where life was believed to originate. Additionally, early Christian art often depicts Eve as a Black woman.

[35] Tierney John, "The Search for Adam & Eve: Scientists Explore a Controversial Theory About Man's Origins," *Newsweek* 111, no. 2 (January 11, 1988): 46.

[36] Birnbaum, *Dark Mother*, 28.

> sapiens.[2] Although not adequately disseminated in popular understanding, there is almost no resistance in the scholarly world to acknowledging african origins of humans. Resistance to accepting a dark african woman as the oldest mother we know remains, however, in the scholarly world.[37]

Lupita Nyong'o, a Kenyan actress known for her roles in several U.S. films, including the 2019 blockbuster movie Black Panther, is said to be a direct descendant of the first female. In a 2020 episode of the U.S. television show, "Finding You Roots", Nyong'o was informed by Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. that she is genetically linked directly to the oldest DNA maternal haplogroup, Mitochondrial Eve. This means she is a direct descendant of the African woman from whom humankind originated.[38]

Although it is well-known in scholarly realms that human civilization existed in Africa well over 200,000 years ago, Africa's importance as the "Mother" of all lands and humanity is not commonly known. Africa's identity has become polluted with misconception, misinformation, distortions, and false conclusions. Eve must be reclaimed and allowed her proper cultural identity.

Genesis 3

Disease, a state of imbalance or disharmony within the body, can be likened to discomfort or unease. Yet, negativity has been unjustly associated with Eve, and many individuals, including Christians, have been conditioned to view her as the source of this dis-ease, namely "sin" or deception, rather than focusing on the remedy: truth.[39] While the concepts of good and evil are present in Genesis 2:9, the term "sin" is notably absent in Genesis 3. According to African theologian John Mbiti, this concept was unknown in pre-colonial African societies. He states:

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37 Birnbaum, *Dark Mother*, 3; Also see Birnbaum's footnote (28) and symposium paper, "Converging Interpretations of Prehistoric Signs for Woman". 28.

38 Kizzi Asala, "Africa Is the Root of Humankind," Africa News, December 1, 2020, https://www.africanews.com/2020/12/01/lupita-nyong-o-s-dna-confirms-humankind-was-born-of-an-african-woman/.

39 Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, xii.

> There is no original sin in African religion [sacred ways of life], neither is a person born a sinner. A person is a sinner by deed in the context of a community of which the person is a member. Sinning is that which injures the philosophical principle of 'I am because you are, and since we are. Therefore, I am.[40]

Furthermore, ancient Babylonians revered their female ancestors, even deifying them, which is in stark contrast to the Western condemnation of Eve.[41] Black Africans, both female and male, and their ascendants possess a rich history spanning over 500,000 years. Before European colonization and the ensuing dehumanization, they were viewed as sacred entities, deeply connected to nature and the cosmos.[42] The term "African ascendant" was created by Kohain Hahlevi to emphasize the forward-moving nature of people of African heritage, rather than "descendant" that implies a backward movement. This term encourages a change in how we discuss African identity and highlights the need to address the lack of knowledge about African history and Diaspora in society and education.[43] Historically, Black women held positions of power and authority, as did Black men. However, dominant Western narratives, often Eurocentric and non-African in perspective, have obscured this reality. The foundation of humanity lies in the rich heritage of Black women and men, rooted in the African continent. Despite this, the Genesis 3 narrative of the Garden of Eden, or "The Fall", has been frequently misinterpreted and weaponized to explain, blame, and justify negative behaviors and circumstances in human lives.

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40 John Mbiti, "God, Sin, and Salvation in African Religion," in *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center | The First Pan-African Christian Church Conference, July 17-23*, ed. Wilmore Gayraud et al. (Atlanta, GA: The ITC Press, 1988), 64.

41 Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, xii.

42 Jarita Holbrook, "Celestial Women of Africa," *The Cultural History of the Universe*, June 30, 2020, 18; Mama Zogbé, *The Sibyls: Demystifying the Absence of the African Ancestress: The First Prophetess of Mami (Wata)* (Martinez, GA: Mami Wata Healers Society of North America Incorporated, 2007).

43 Chinwe L. Okpalaoka and Cynthia B. Dillard, "(Im)Migrations, Relations, and Identities of African Peoples: Toward an Endarkened Transnational Feminist Praxis in Education," *Journal of Educational Foundations* 26, no. 1–2 (Winter-Spring 2012): 122.

The prevailing narrative of Eve as the originator of sin, which contradicts the earlier assertion in Genesis 1:31 that all of creation, including Black people, were deemed "good" by the Deity raises critical questions for Christians. This erroneous narrative, akin to a disease, has caused a pandemic of falsehoods, perpetuating harm against Mother Africa, her people on the continent, the African Diaspora, and all of humanity.

The misinterpretation of Eve's story in Genesis 3 has spread globally, analogous to a pandemic. This "pandemic of falsehoods", as coined by Kelly Heath, has been perpetuated by Western Christianity[44] and has had devastating consequences for Africa and its Diaspora.[45] This widespread misinformation, known as mythomania or pathological lying, has been used as a tool of oppression, particularly through the manipulation of Christianity. While Christianity can be seen as the source of this problem, it also holds potential solutions to this global issue. The distortion of Eve's story served political purposes during the European colonization of Africa, aligning with the colonizers' aim to establish Christianity as the dominant religion of the Roman Empire.

Christianity

The canonization of the Bible and the establishment of Western Christianity were both ushered in by the Roman emperor, Constantine, who made Christianity the recognized religion of the Roman Empire.[46] While Christianity has its roots in African spirituality,[47] it was influenced by political and economic motives, shaping the doctrines and interpretations of sacred texts. The doctrine of the "Original Sin", attributed to Eve, became

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44 Don Vaughan, "What Is the Most Widely Practiced Religion in the World?," Britannica | History & Society, May 19, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/story/what-is-the-most-widely-practiced-religion-in-the-world.

45 Kelly Heath, "The Classical Definition of a Pandemic Is Not Elusive," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 89, no. 7 (July 1, 2011): 540–41, https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.11.088815; Miguel Porta, ed., *A Dictionary of Epidemiology*, Sixth (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

46 Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26: The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, Electronic, vol. 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 229.

47 David T. Adamo, "Christianity and the African Traditional Religion(s): The Postcolonial Round of Engagement," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no. 1 (October 31, 2011): 10, https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v32i1.285.

widespread in the 4th century as a result of Saint Augustine's interpretations, consequently justifying harmful actions against marginalized groups. John Mbiti argues that the concept of sin in African religions is not about inherent guilt but, rather, about actions that harm the community,[48] challenging the traditional Western narrative and prompting a reinterpretation of Eve's role in Genesis 3.

Exploring ancient Egyptian culture, writings, and history provides an alternative perspective on Eve. Long before Christianity, ancient Kemet, or KMT (Egypt), encompassed much of North Africa and was considered part of the Ancient Near East (presently called the Middle East and extending into modern-day Asia and Europe). In this society, Black women held esteemed positions, even as Pharaohs, and were often considered as wisdom personified. Hatshepsut, for example, was a female Pharaoh (Living Horus), who ruled Egypt successfully.[49]

In the Bible, the book of Proverbs 1:1-3, 20 discusses wisdom as the female aspect of humanity:

> [1]The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: [2] For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, [3] for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteous, justice, and equity...[20] Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.

In ancient Kemetian traditions, serpents often symbolized wisdom and divinity. This raises intriguing questions about Eve's ability to communicate with the serpent in Genesis 3 while Adam could not. Could it be that Eve, as the Mother of All Living, possessed divine wisdom herself? Ancient Egyptian culture, which was closely intertwined with Hebrew traditions, offers an alternative understanding whereby serpents were revered as divine, wise,

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48 Mbiti, "God, Sin, and Salvation," 63–64; Burdette Lowe, "Pharaoh Let My People Go, Christianity Is Air!!! A Black Church History Account Grounded in Truth Rather than Tradition, of African Americans' Evolution into Christianity and Its Influence on Christian Education and Black Identity (Genesis 15:12)" (Unpublished Dissertation, Clark Atlanta University, May 2020).

49 Danita R. Redd, "Hatshepsut: The Female Horus," in *Black Women in Antiquity*, ed. Ivan Van Sertima, Revised Edition, vol. 6, Journal of African Civilization (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988), 188.

and feminine. This connection suggests that Eve's ability to converse with the serpent may stem from her divine nature.

Charles Finch, an expert on the relationship between the Bible and African experiences, proposes that Eve, whose Hebrew name "Havvah" is similar to the Egyptian "Hefa," was, in fact, a representation of the great Mother serpent, the cosmic serpent encircling the world's creation. He argues that the serpent did not deceive Eve but rather that Eve was the serpent herself, embodying wisdom and divine feminine power.[50] This interpretation challenges the traditional Western understanding of Eve, highlighting the need to consider the historical and cultural context of the Bible, and recognizing the influence of ancient Egyptian beliefs on Hebrew traditions.

Charles B. Copher points out that the word "Egypt" appears 740 times in the Old Testament, further emphasizing the significance of Egypt in biblical history.[51] Moroever, it is stressed that ancient Egyptians were Sub-Saharan Africans, as evidenced by their self-designation as "Kmu" (means "black" in their language).[52] This challenges Western interpretations that often downplay the African identity of ancient Egyptians.

Black women in the Diaspora, African American women, and African women share a common gender with other women, but their unique histories and experiences often go unrecognized or misrepresented. This misrepresentation, like the misuse of the Bible to justify slavery and oppression of Africans and their ascendants, has led to a distorted view of women, particularly Black women. This distortion stems from the misinterpretation of the Genesis 3 narrative of Adam and Eve and the emphasis on the concept of the original sin. This biblical interpretation has positioned women as the source of (dis)ease, causing a global "pandemic" of problems. Black women in particular have been wrongly maligned and

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50 Charles Finch, "The Bible and the African Experience: Response to Dr. Charles Copher," in The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center | The First Pan-African Christian Church Conference, July 17-23, ed. Wilmore, Gayraud et al. (Atlanta, GA: The ITC Press, 1988), 56–57.

51 Charles Copher, "The Bible and the African Experience: The Biblical Period," in *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center | The First Pan-African Christian Church Conference, July 17-23*, ed. Wilmore, Gayraud et al. (Atlanta, GA: The ITC Press, 1988), 34–35.

52 Finch, "The Bible and the African Experience," 52.

excluded from their rightful place in sacred history and status. Healing and restoration require recovering the truth and rejecting inaccurate portrayals. The false narrative of the "Mother of All Living" as the originator of sin has caused immense harm to Africa, its Diaspora, and humanity resulting in spiritual abuse and fueling GBV.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the intertwined exploitation of women and the Earth, historically justified by manipulated religious interpretations, has inflicted profound and enduring harm. This interconnected violence, deeply rooted in patriarchal systems and colonial legacies, has manifested in environmental degradation, gender-based violence, and the marginalization of vulnerable communities. By recognizing the interconnectedness of these issues and challenging the dominant narratives perpetuating them, we can pave the way for a more just and sustainable future.

Reclaiming the narrative of Eve as a symbol of wisdom and divine feminine power is crucial in dismantling the harmful stereotypes and misinterpretations that have fueled the oppression of women. Embracing an intersectional approach that acknowledges the diverse experiences of women, particularly women of color, is essential to addressing the root causes of both environmental destruction and gender-based violence. By empowering women, amplifying their voices, and centering their experiences, we can foster a collective movement towards healing, restoration, and creating a world where women and the Earth are honored and respected.

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Called and Queer: Lived Religion and LGBTQ Methodist Clergy by Megan Robertson

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SHORT BIO

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General overview

Called and Queer: Lived Religion and LGBTQ Methodist Clergy in South Africa represents an important, insightful, and nuanced contribution to scholarly literature seeking to understand the lived experiences of queer clergy as they navigate the structures of intersectional oppression within the church and society. The study is ethnographic in nature, using the framework of lived religion to deeply explore the experiences of six queer clergy within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). The research involved the author spending a week with each of the participants, joining in and observing their day to day activities inside and outside of the church. The author also conducted in depth interviews with each participant to shed light on their lived experiences of being queer clergy in the MCSA, exploring the ways in which the church represented a space of both belonging and exclusion, and the ways in which the clergy navigated these realities.

The lens of lived religion is a particular strength of the study, allowing for a complex analysis of the ways in which various forms of oppression are

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upheld and reinscribed. This is done, not only through more commonly analyzed structural means in the shape of legal and policy frameworks, official stances, or ways of understanding the bible and theologies, but also through the understudied, less covert (but no less powerful) everyday discursive and material practices and realities within the MCSA. Robertson makes a compelling case that lived experience has been broadly marginalized within scholarship and yet these "invisible and taken-for-granted ways of doing things"[1] are key to understanding the ways in which power relations of race, gender, and sexuality are reproduced and sustained. As such, these must be taken seriously in any project seeking to "queer" the church and promote relations of equity and social justice. In this regard, the book centers the day-to-day lived realities of six queer clergy to provide a more holistic understanding of the ways in which power operates within the MCSA, at both structural and individual levels, to include and exclude and to privilege and oppress.

The chosen methodology also allows for an important conversation between structure and agency. While the work offers necessary engagement with the structures that shape the landscape of queer inclusion and exclusion at a broader level (from a wider continental level, to the particularities of the South African landscape, to the specific context of the MCSA within South Africa), there is an insistence that this does not represent the full picture. The study then offers a recognition of individual agency and a commitment to exploring the ways in which people navigate the contexts of which they are part. This is particularly necessary because there are not always clear lines of connection between what is taking place at a structural level and at a personal level. People's lived experience, including the ways in which people navigate their day-to-day lives, make decisions, and construct their relationships, are frequently unexpected and disconnected from what one would assume if they only looked at the broader structures and the official policies and positions.

Robertson's commitment to rejecting binaries and disrupting static positions is clear throughout the book and forms an important part of her orientation to the queering project.

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[1] Megan Robertson, *Called and Queer: Lived Religion and LGBTQ Methodist Clergy in South Africa*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2.

Chapter by chapter overviews'

The book consists of five chapters: an introduction, three chapters exploring, engaging, and analyzing the study's main findings, and a conclusion.

The introduction provides a broad background, rationale, and orientation for the study. It engages with the landscape of LGBTQ inclusion and exclusion within South Africa, with the country being seen as a "queer utopia" given its progressive constitutional framework and protections of queer rights, particularly in comparison to many other African countries. However, it also acknowledges that this categorization belies the still deeply engrained homophobia that is perpetuated both ideologically and materially across various sites, including that of the church. The chapter also introduces the MCSA through, what Robertson sees as, three distinct institutional cultures that are in operation within the church that she has categorized according to key Methodist figures whose stories in some way exemplify these discourses. Robertson also sets out her methods, asserts her own positionality and commitments, introduces the six clergy, builds a foundation for how she seeks to explore the dialectal relationship between structure and agency, and grounds her approach to and understanding of the idea of "queerness" and the work of "queering".

The second chapter, "The Church of Mandela: Black Methodism and Queer Identity", explores the first strand of institutional culture and discourse that Robertson identifies that was exemplified by Nelson Mandela, the first president of democratic South Africa and a Methodist. This categorization denotes a prominent strand within the MCSA that links the denomination with historical resistance to apartheid and a broad orientation to social justice. Importantly, Robertson notes that this narrative and reality of the MCSA as a beacon of social justice is contested, with experiences of "division, marginalisation, and... violence" existing alongside "safety, status, and social belonging",[2] particularly for queer congregants and clergy in the church. Robertson draws poetic parallels between these contestations and those relating to the legacy of Mandela within South Africa. Mandela is prominently seen as a symbol of liberation, social justice, and progress but has, in more recent years, also been associated to "the failure of realizing the vision of an equal, democratic, and inclusive society".[3] Besides

[2] Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 74.

[3] Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 55.

identifying the MCSA with narratives of (albeit contested) social justice, the title of "The Church of Mandela" also speaks to a prominently black, traditional expression of Methodism that is widely seen and understood as the denominationally pure and legitimate expression. Within this framing, Robertson unpacks the key role that race plays "in shaping participants' experiences and their understanding of their identities as queer individuals, clergy, and Methodists",[4] and analyses the ways in which participant's navigate issues of belonging, power, and legitimacy within this racialized landscape.

The third chapter, "The Church of Purity: Gender Binaries and Gendered Bodies", explores a second aspect of MCSA's institutional culture. The categorization of "The Church of Purity" identifies the MCSA as a church that is *officially* committed to gender equality, an orientation seen to be evidenced in the fact that a woman, Purity Malinga, held the highest position of presiding bishop at the time of writing. However, it simultaneously a church in which the patriarchy is alive and well, reproduced through various mechanisms and in various ways. The chapter notes how this story of what may be (rightly) seen as a success in addressing questions of representation of women in key positions of leadership, gets deployed in ways that instead work to uphold unequal and problematic gender power relations. This takes place through the exceptionalization of stories like that of Malinga and others, a mechanism that works to "individualize their achievements while obscuring the continued existence of gendered norms that continue to keep most women and other minorities from holistically participating in and contributing to the Church".[5]

The fourth chapter, "The Church of Ecclesia: Sex, Love, and Marriage", explores a third aspect of the MCSA's institutional identify through the story of Ecclesia De Lange, a queer minister who was fired following her announcement that she would be marrying her same-sex partner. This story highlights the ambiguities of the MCSA regarding its stance of so-called inclusion and claim of being "a community of love rather than rejection"[6] (quoted from the MCSA's 2001 conference proceedings) given its

4 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 61.
5 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 92.
6 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 5.

simultaneous refusal to condone same-sex marriages, foregrounding the various mechanisms through which heteronormative ideas about sex, family, and relationships are upheld. Robertson crucially notes that "implicit within a stance such as the MCSA's which claims to accept all people regardless of their sexual orientation, yet which simultaneously rejects same-sex marriage, is the expectation of queer celibacy".[7] The lens of lived experience and lived religion sheds light on the significant gap that exists between the "public transcript" that aligns to the official church position on all things sex, love, and marriage versus the stance embodied in the "hidden transcript".[8] In the shadow of the official position that leaves no space to understand sex and relationships outside of heterosexual marriage, Robertson's work reveals a "queer sub-culture" where sex and relationships are explored in a myriad of ways within people's lived religion and experience. However, importantly, this too is a site of contestation. While holding potential for liberatory possibilities, this culture is also imbibed with patriarchal and positional hierarchies that work to reinscribe gender norms and power dynamics in nuanced and complex ways.

The final chapter, "Conclusion: Queering the MCSA", engages and brings together the book's key contributions, highlighting the myriad of "unacknowledged ways that race, gender, and sex are inscribed in the institutional culture of the Church".[9]

Interesting insights and key contributions

The book reveals several interesting insights and key contributions, a few of which I will touch on below.

Expanding conceptualizations of resistance

The theme of resistance is explored throughout the book. Robertson questions the expectations often placed on those marginalized (in this example, the queer clergy) by harmful and oppressive structures in the church to resist and challenge these structures. Here, she notes that "the

7 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 127.

8 James C. Scott. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990).

9 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 2.

coupling of agency with resistance, negotiation, transformation, and change suggests that one cannot be queer and Christian without performing a particular type of queer identity — one which is inherently tied to a form of activism".[10] Robertson also troubles the limitations of how resistance is often framed and understood, offering a more expansive engagement with how people exercise agency and navigate power dynamics in varied ways for varied reasons.

Robertson unpacks several examples throughout the book that illustrate what this exercising of agency looks like and how it is often contested, resisting oppressive norms in certain ways, and reproducing the power dynamics of the status quo in other ways. Examples of this include how the queer clergy subvert and appropriate widely held harmful theologies to advocate for LGBTQ justice and inclusion, how the queer women clergy resist the dress-code that the church seeks to enforce upon them, the ways in which the queer clergy embrace varied expressions of "queer families and kinship",[11] and how exploring the clergy's "privacy and silence" about their sexuality acts "as a form of less overt resistance".[12]

Policing and surveillance as disciplinary mechanisms

Another key theme that emerges throughout the book is the various ways in which policing and surveillance take place within the MCSA, directed in particular ways at certain bodies.

Robertson highlights the ways in which the dress codes of particularly queer, black, women clergy are heavily surveilled and policed. An expectation is put on these women to present themselves in ways that "fit comfortably within normatively feminine framings".[13] As theorized by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, for the successful creation of what he terms "docile bodies", surveillance must go hand in hand with punishment of transgressions.[14] In the case of the queer, women clergy's non-compliance with prescribed dress codes, punishment ranges from

10 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 14.
11 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 147.
12 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 144.
13 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 97.
14 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (Vintage Books, 1995).

"subtle reprimands" to "more formal procedures of assessment",[15] and "violently misogynistic act(s) of imposed dominance and gender 'correction'".[16]

Robertson also finds evidence of the "policing of behaviour and mannerisms",[17] specific to queer, men clergy who are expected to perform their masculinity in specific ways. Similarly, the sex lives and relationships of the queer clergy were policed in various ways, with women bearing the brunt of this.

Tensions between belonging and exclusion

Another theme that arose in the Robertson's analysis was the complex tension between belonging and exclusion in the MCSA. Robertson comes to this topic with her own backstory of simultaneous belonging and exclusion from the MCSA, which she includes in her self-reflection in the book, as well as with the reflections of the six queer clergy whose stories form the substance of this work. One participant reflected on how, in their younger years, the church represented a site of belonging, particularly in contrast to their experience at school, and yet, since then, they had experienced various forms of exclusion at the hands of this very same church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Robertson's work, *Called and Queer: Lived Religion and LGBTQ Methodist Clergy in South Africa,* is an important contribution across several fields. Its commitment to, use, and theorization of a lived religion framework as an analytical imperative to uncovering of the covert ways in which power relations are reproduced is vital. Moreover, its engagement with ideas around queerness and what the queering project must involve is necessary and insightful. The light that it sheds on the experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA, how they navigate this space, and how problematic relations of power get reproduced and reinscribed is timely and important.

15 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 97–98.
16 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 107.
17 Robertson, *Called and Queer,* 104.

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