Journal of Gender & Religion in Africa

Volume 23. No. 2 December 2017

JOURNAL OF GENDER AND RELIGION IN AFRICA

Publication Information

Volume 23 No. 2 December 2017

ISSN: 1025-5648

Published semi-annually, in July and December, by:

Department of Religion and Theology
Physical Address:
Faculty of Arts, Office D9
Desmond Tutu Centre
Department of Religion and Theology
University of the Western Cape
Robert Sobukwe Road, Bellville, 7535
Cape Town, Western Cape, South
Tel: +27 (0) 21 959 2383
E-mail: jgra.uwc@gmail.com / lscharnickudemans@uwc.ac.za

The Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa
is a **DOHET Accredited** Journal

International Representatives

Prof Cheryl Anderson (Garrett Theological Seminary, USA)
Prof Elias K. Bongmba (Rich University, USA)
Prof Martha Frederiks (University of Utrecht, The Netherlands)
Prof Roderick Hewitt (Council for World Mission/ University of KwaZulu-Natal)
Dr Fulata Lusungu Moyo (World Council of Churches, Switzerland)
Prof Philomena Mwaura (Kenyatta University, Kenya)
Dr Dana Robert (Boston University, USA)

JOURNAL OF GENDER AND RELIGION IN AFRICA
EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT

The *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* (JGRA) is a semi-annual publication moved in 2017 from the Gender and Religion programme at UKZN (or the Centre for Deconstructive Theology at UKZN) to the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society at the University of the Western Cape.

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

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

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

CONTENTS

Editorial

Sarojini Nadar[1] and Fatima Seedat[2]

Sex, text, food and bodies – offers a good summary of the key themes in the articles presented in this issue of the *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa*. While developing bodies of knowledge within the fields of gender and religion in Africa is the main focus of this journal, in this issue, the focus is also on a critical interrogation of real bodies – bodies which are sexed, bodies which need real sustenance, bodies which are shaped by religious and cultural norms, and bodies which are circumscribed by the gendered norms of ancient sacred texts as well as contemporary media texts.

Several feminist scholars have pointed out that the provision of daily sustenance for the bodies of children and families, as well as other labour conventionally provided by women, is often missed in the literature that describes the relationship between labour and economy. While the work involved in the provision of food is largely ignored or downplayed in mainstream economic statistics, it has certainly not been adequately interrogated within the fields of theology and religion. In her article "Extending the Table: Eucharist as a Model for Feminist Food Justice", Elizabeth Getman explores the space of the Eucharist as a site to explore "the link between the ritual of communion and the practice of feeding real bodies, real food." Contextualised within studies on food security and feminist theology, this article makes a case for moving beyond the church charity models of food provision towards a concept of food justice that reclaims the kitchen "as a sacred space in which to practice theological action." Getman is careful to note that reclaiming this space does not indicate a biologically essentialist alignment with the popular adage, "a woman's place is in the kitchen" but instead argues

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

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

that a commitment to food justice requires a shift in thinking beyond gender binaries.

Recognising that gender binaries are often constructed and maintained by and within sacred texts, in his article “Paul, the ‘Real’ Man: Constructions and Representations of Masculinity in 1 Corinthians”, Johnathan Jodamus critically interrogates how masculinity is constructed within the text of 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5. While the text on the surface may be seen to celebrate the apparent vulnerable masculinity which Paul displays; on the contrary, through the method of socio-rhetorical interpretation, and a critical gendered lens, Jodamus shows that the text actually belies a more powerful masculinity that entrenches rather than subverts the prevailing gendered norms. He cautions scholars working within a liberation paradigm and who reach for facile models of “redemptive masculinities” within the biblical text that they should not overestimate the performativity of biblical discourse in addressing issues of toxic masculinities. As one reviewer points out: “This is especially the case where contexts exist attributing almost magical quality to the performativity of biblical discourses, since an exaggerated appropriation may actually evoke serious alternative problematics.” The importance of nuance within biblical interpretation even within or perhaps especially within gendered readings of the text is encouraged.

The subject of nuance is picked up in the article by Megan Robertson which reviews various scholarly contributions at the intersections of queer sexuality and religion. Robertson helpfully categorises the literature into three themes: the irreconcilable contradiction, negotiating sexuality and religion, and transformative queer religiosity. It is within the latter two more nuanced trajectories of scholarship that Robertson finds particular value especially within the context of calls for more decolonised ways of producing knowledge. When viewed through a decolonial lens, one is compelled to look for paradigms beyond those which conceptualise Africa as a site of irredeemable patriarchy and queer-phobia. This critical review of scholarship, going beyond the irreconcilable contradiction, is therefore an important contribution for scholars wanting to research in this field, particularly in Africa.

Sustaining the value of a critical review of scholarship, Saras Reddy and Thobeka Khubisa explore the possible theoretical framings available to a study of women in bodybuilding, adding valuable nuance to the field by introducing religion and culture as a fresh analytic lens. Operations on the body – intense training schedules, regulated diet regimes, and high intensity competition preparation – come under the scrutiny of cultural and religious norms. Women who pursue body building are “viewed as

transgressing or breaking away from the cultural constructs of gender and how women's bodies are supposed to be; [namely] their embodiment of muscle". The agential activity involved in body building also challenges "historical understandings of the black female body; as sexualised and warranting regulation". The juxtaposition of theoretical framings of the body that is inscribed by identity, the performative body, government of the body, and the body as an evolving 'project', highlight potentially rich theoretical texture available in the study of women's bodybuilding subcultures. The authors argue that women's bodybuilding illustrates the ways in which bodies are a "cultural artefact" policed by historical and contemporary norms, and women's bodybuilding subcultures enter into these sites of bodily production not only to "celebrate the female body" but also to "manipulate their bodies" outside of patriarchal limitations.

Osman and Shaikh remain in the realm of body politics, this time examining queerphobia, homonationalism and intersectionality in local South African politics of queerness. They draw on Jasbir K. Puar's analytic of the regulatory effect of "the authoritative and universal queer archetype" built upon "a false binary" between queer and Muslim. Through an analysis of the work, politics and theology of *The Inner Circle*, they point to the ways in which queer politics troubles the "heteronormativity within the 'mainstream' Muslim community in the Cape". They demonstrate the ways in which the TIC simultaneously "resists the regulatory framework of queerness" and, through participation in the Cape Town Pride March which represents an exclusionary elite politics, also becomes "complicit with such a regulatory neoliberal formation". Importantly, the work of TIC is supported through progressive interpretations and a framework of Muslim liberation theology, "collective resource(s) to nourish Queer Muslims".

Similarly, Ismail and Seedat's work also relates to the connection between historical and contemporary religious expressions. In this case they explore the online fatwa platform of a South African based jurist, for the ways in which petitioners and muftis co-construct a juristic discourse on sexuality in marriage. Through the fatwa case studies on imam.com of Mufti Ismail Desai, they explore how Muslim adherents in minority contexts navigate "the dissonance between contemporary expectations of marriage and sexual intimacy characterised by mutuality and reciprocity and fiqh-based gender asymmetrical norms", to produce current sexual norms. Using a feminist poststructural lens, Ismail and Seedat identify five strategies that illustrate a move toward an "ethical discourse centred on mutuality". Desai, they argue, combines the historical legal imperative to preserve marriage in minority Muslim

contexts where marriage is conceptualised through ideas of mutuality, “female agency and choice”, thus constructing a narrative of sexual communication and benevolent masculinity. In their formulation of questions and responses, Ismail and Seedat suggest that petitioners and muftis may also be presenting “possible future reformulations of an ethics of marriage as mutuality and wellbeing”.

Staying with contemporary media texts, Scharnick-Udemans explores the ways in which bodies of knowledge are erased or circumscribed from mainstream knowledge production, particularly in the area of media and religion. She reviews a critical corpus of work by feminist scholars who have recognised this absence and have made cases for “the importance of gender’s inclusion and centralisation [in] the interdisciplinary study of religion and media.” Using a South African contemporary case study of pastors who encourage “grass-eating” and “petrol-drinking” of their female parishioners, the author shows the importance of an intersectional lens in reviewing the interdisciplinary production of knowledge on religion and media, because while the absence of gendered bodies of knowledge seem to be theorised and denounced, a similar absence of Africa as both an epistemological and a conversational partner is left unspoken of.

Between the bodies of petitioners, the words of muftis, the utterances of African prophets, the diets of bodybuilders, the politics of homosexual pride, queer religiosity, the interplay of vulnerable and interpretive masculinities, and a commitment to food justice, this issue brings together novel explorations of the sexual and nutritional appetites of bodies proscribed by religion and culture.

Religio-cultural ideals of women's body shapes: A review of black women's engagement with bodybuilding

Thobeka Khubisa[1] **Sarasvathie Reddy**[2]

Abstract

This article provides an overview of existing literature around the conceptions of women's engagement in the sport of bodybuilding. It aims to explore specifically how religious and cultural conceptions of black women's bodies influence their engagement in bodybuilding, with a particular focus on Zulu Christian women. The review foregrounds debates on how, although a previously male-dominated sport, women all around the world are becoming prevalent participators in the sport. It provides a general perspective of the conceptions of women's engagement in bodybuilding from a western world-view and links it to how black women's bodies are conceptualised from an African perspective. This review is part of a larger study in Gender, Religion and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights and the themes and concepts covered by the literature review, emanate from the intersections of the above three focus areas, respectively. Although most of the literature in the field of women's engagement in bodybuilding pertains to white female bodybuilders, certain concepts can be generalised and related to the context of black female bodybuilders, Zulu, Christian female bodybuilders in particular.

Introduction

A bodybuilder is "any person who lifts weights, trains, and eats methodically in order to obtain an ideally muscular, symmetrical, and proportioned body, primarily for aesthetic purposes often related to his or her participation in bodybuilding competitions."[3]

[1] Thobeka Khubisa is a former Masters student at the University of KwaZulu- Natal in the programme of Gender, Religion and Health. She is currently a registered PhD student at the University of the Western Cape. Her research interests are in gender studies and women's body politics.

[2] Sarasvathie Reddy (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the Higher Education Training Development Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She spent the first decade of her academic life at the Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine as the Head of the Skills Laboratory where she was involved in teaching the clinical aspects of the medical curriculum. Her research interests in higher education include a focus on gender and diversity, curriculum studies, doctoral education and academic development. She is also involved in two international research projects with a focus on gender, religion and health as well as sexual diversity in higher education curricula. (reddys15@ukzn.ac.za)

[3] L. McTavish, *Feminist Figure Girl: Look Hot While You Fight the Patriarchy*. New York: State University of New York Press, (2015).

The activity of bodybuilding, which was predominantly a male dominated sport in the past, has more recently attracted female participants. Women's participation in competitive bodybuilding has begun to raise controversial questions in current day society when it comes to the understanding of issues of masculinities, femininities and identity.[4] Among such questions is whether those who engage in bodybuilding are more masculine or less feminine than those who do not.[5] Some of the findings of studies on women's participation in bodybuilding reveal that when it comes to black female bodybuilders, the concept of bodybuilding becomes even more complicated. Consequently, the body becomes a contested site of struggle between powers that "strive to exercise control over it."[6] These powers often emerge as a result of socialisation through religious and cultural institutions. Thus, religious and cultural conceptions of women's bodies have been discussed by some scholars as some of the factors that influence the way women perceive their bodies and the way their bodies are perceived and conceived by others.[7] It is these religious and cultural conceptions of women's bodies that are often used as a critique of women who engage in bodybuilding as their bodies are said to be unusual and not shaped according to their religious and cultural expectations.

Women's engagement in bodybuilding as a sport is not a new phenomenon. However, it is still shunned upon by many because of the perceptions in most communities that the sport is for men and is not suited to women.[8] In the midst of these perceptions, more and more women are engaging in bodybuilding.[9] Religious and cultural conceptions restrict women's engagement in bodybuilding because of the existing societal ideals of 'feminine' and 'masculine' beauty and self-image.[10]

---

[4] R. Duff and L. Hong, "Self-Images of Women Bodybuilders," *Sociology of Sport Journal*, no.1 (1984.): 374-380.
[5] Duff & Hong, "Self-Images of Women Bodybuilders,"
[6] P. Loeto, "Notions of Beauty and Attractiveness," *Buwa! Feminism and Culture* 2(2) (2013): 52-57.
[7] P. Roussel, and J. Griffet. "The Path Chosen by Female Bodybuilders: A Tentative Interpretation." *Sociology of Sport Journa*l 17 (2000):130-150.
[8] Roussel and Griffet, "The Path Chosen,"
[9] Roussel and Griffet, "The Path Chosen,"
[10] Roussel and Griffet, "The Path Chosen,"

What follows in this article is a broad overview of the discursive gender debates around female masculinity and transgression, and the reinforcement of gender norms within the subculture of body building. It explores how the black female body is shaped and conceptualised within religion and culture, with a particular focus on the Zulu culture and the Christian religion. The study focuses on Zulu culture and Christian religion in order to understand how both have conceptualised women's bodies, specifically the bodies of female bodybuilders. In this way, it could be gathered whether their understandings of religion and culture, from their personal experiences, could be considered as one or separate, hence the use of the term 'religio-cultural'[11] in the title. The implications of intense training and diet regimes on the reproductive health of female bodybuilders during competition preparation is also explored. The discussion then turns to how the female body is a site of struggle for black female bodybuilders as well as how they continuously negotiate a glass ceiling within the sport; and how, in their pursuit of gaining muscle mass, they ensure they still look feminine.

Masculinity vs Femininity

A female bodybuilder is understood as being "any woman who intentionally builds her body through rigorous diet and training to gain significant amounts of muscle mass."[12] Such women are often viewed as transgressing or breaking away from the cultural constructs of gender and how women's bodies are supposed to be; their embodiment of muscle "transgresses gender norms and challenges Western ideals of what it means to be female."[13] They are viewed as transgressors because they are developing a new self-image and identity of feminine beauty in contradiction to the slim and skinny ideal of bodily beauty.[14] As a result, cis-gendered female bodybuilders are continuously marginalised and stigmatised because "new ways of thinking and living move female bodybuilders away from social and cultural norms."[15] Female masculinity is misunderstood because the ways in which

[11] The term 'religio-cultural' is used because the study was interested in black female bodybuilders who were of the Zulu culture and subscribed to the Christian religion. The use of the term is also as a result of the existing debates around religion and culture being one or separate. Through conducting the study, it could be extracted that based on their lived experiences, as black women, whether they understood religion and culture as one entity or as separate.

[12] V. Felkar. "Marginalized Muscle: Transgression and the Female Bodybuilder." *Ignite UBC Women's and Gender Studies Undergraduate Journal* 4(1) (2012): 40-49.

[13] Felkar, "Marginalized Muscle," 40.

[14] Roussel and Griffet, "The Path Chosen,"

[15] Roussel and Griffet, "The Path Chosen," 131.

women's bodies are conceptualised do not encourage the co-existence of both femininity and masculinity in one body. Female bodybuilders in their pursuit of muscle provide a counter narrative and a different way of imagining the female body; that it is possible for what is understood as femininity and masculinity to exist in a female body.

For Worthen and Baker, "the desire to compete in bodybuilding is coded as masculine behaviour, thus women bodybuilders exemplify gendered deviance and a risk of social stigma."[16] Engagement in and with bodybuilding becomes more of a lifestyle than an activity. Their bodybuilding routine is adhered to from the time they wake up until they sleep. Thus, all their activities are centered on their pursuit of building muscular bodies. As a result, "their bodies no longer meet the traditional and acknowledged criteria of femininity."[17] Instead, "while a slim and slender, willowy body is the ideal in feminine beauty, the extreme muscularity of these women's bodies causes them to be viewed as manlike by the lay person".[18] Muscular female bodies are misunderstood as deviant and different to the accepted norm and, as a result, female bodybuilders are often marginalised and stigmatised for their 'abnormal' ways of defining themselves and defining female beauty in general.[19] These perceptions of the deviance of the muscular female body have motivated the larger study that investigates the experiences of black female bodybuilders with the aim of understanding how religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies, as black women, influenced their engagement in bodybuilding.

The Black Female Body and Culture

Within the context of black female bodybuilders, the criticism is influenced by historical understandings of the black female body; as sexualised and warranting regulation.[20] A typical example of these perspectives is the issue of Sarah Baartman and the nineteenth century phenomenon known as Baartmanmania. Sarah Baartman, a black South African woman, was displayed in the zoos and museums of Europe during the nineteenth century due to her extremely large hips, breasts and buttocks. [21] This was in an era that viewed black bodies as slaves

[16] Worthen and Baker, "Pushing Up on the Glass Ceiling," 471.
[17] Roussel and Griffet, "The Path Chosen," 131.
[18] Roussel and Griffet, "The Path Chosen," 131.
[19] Felkar, "Marginalized Muscle,"
[20] F. Settler and M.H. Engh. "The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse in South Africa," *Alternation Special Edition,* 14 (2015):126-148.
[21] M.T. Jackson, "MeTelling: Recovering the Black Female Body," *Visual Culture & Gender,* 8 (2013): 70-81.

and commodities. The parading of her body in particular indicates the commodification and policing of her body and the black female body in general.[22] She was advertised as possessing the "kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen."[23] Her kind of body shape was considered as being the ideal feminine shape by black African men. Mastamet-Mason reiterates how, "in most African countries, it is still a common belief that thin women are not attractive."[24] This is because full-figured women are considered more attractive, respected and their "padded (with flesh) and curvaceous bodies" are said to represent wealth, good health and fertility.[25] This is evident in how:

> overweight or obese women of Zulu ethnicity are generally viewed in a positive light, with favourable cultural associations ranging from beauty to physical wellbeing, happiness, vitality, affluence and fecundity-all linked to the fuller figure.[26]

This can also be referred to as the 'traditional' Zulu female body ideal.[27]

Culture often plays a role in the construction of the 'ideal body' with women's bodies being constructed and shaped as per male preferences. Often, "the privileging of patriarchy in Zulu culture has meant that often women are denied the opportunity to question their own behaviour in relation to the body ideal, size and shape".[28] As a result, black women are denied ownership of their bodies in consideration to male cultural preferences.[29] This policing of women's bodies can be linked to the historical regulation of women's bodies. As Pumla Qgola states, "women's bodies are seen as accessible for consumption and control".[30] However, in contrast to the regulation of women's bodies, black female bodybuilders, through their embodiment of muscle, communicate a message of resistance by claiming ownership of their bodies. Whereas in

---

[22] Jackson, "MeTelling: Recovering the Black Female Body,"
[23] S. Qureshi. "Displaying Sara Baartman, The 'Hottentot Venus," *Science History Publications*. (2004): 233-257.
[24] Mastamet-Mason, "The Saartjie Baartman's Body Shape versus the Victorian Dress," 114.
[25] Mastamet-Mason, "The Saartjie Baartman's Body Shape versus the Victorian Dress," 114.
[26] W.N. Ogana. and V.B. Ojong. "Sexual body ideal among Zulu women: Continuity and Change," *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems,* 11(1) (2012): 32-48.
[27] Ogana and Ojong, "Sexual body ideal among Zulu women,"
[28] W.N. Ogana and V.B. Ojong. "The thin/thick ideal: Zulu women's body as a site of cultural and postcolonial feminist struggle," *Agenda* 27(4) (2013): 110-119.
[29] Ogana and Ojong, "The thin/thick ideal,"
[30] P.D. Gqola. "How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender based violence in contemporary South Africa," *African Identities*, 5(1) (2007): 111-124.

many cases “women’s ideal body preferences are often marginalised”, engagement in bodybuilding by black women shows defiance and a refusal to shape their bodies for the male gaze.[31]

It is worth noting that in as much as the voluptuous body ideal is still held by Zulu people in contemporary times, the beginning of the twenty first century has seen a shift in how isiZulu-speaking women perceive the female body ideal, leaning “increasingly toward the western thin ideal.”[32] Having said that, however, it is interesting how the “Western society views a thin body as the ideal body”[33] while black African, especially Zulu societies, view the curvaceous full-figured body as the ideal body and how black female bodybuilders, choose to conform to neither of the two body ideals. In so doing “the female bodybuilder provides a new space for thinking about the body and produces a new image of what women can achieve.”[34] The existing cultural conceptions of black women’s bodies often coincide with religious conceptions of women’s bodies.

Female Black Body and Christian Religion

It is necessary to point out that Christian religion is not a homogenous religious tradition. The data provided below cannot be generalised for all Christian church denominations. As this study did not focus on any particular Christian church denomination, this section seeks to provide a general dominant understanding of women’s bodies from a general Christian perspective.

During the colonial era, missionaries did not only shape women’s individual identities but also “constructed the meaning of womanhood based on predetermined social and sexual mores.”[35] For example, in Zimbabwe, the sexuality of women “was governed by religious codes of sexual purity legitimated by biblical teachings.”[36] From a Christian perspective, “Christian missionaries viewed African’ women’s exposed

[31] Ogana and Ojong, “The thin/thick ideal,”
[32] Ogana and Ojong, “Sexual body ideal among Zulu women,” 32.
[33] Mastamet-Mason, “The Saartjie Baartman’s Body Shape versus the Victorian Dress,”114.
[34] L. Johnston. “Flexing Femininity: Female Body-builders refiguring ‘the body’.” *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography,* 3(3) (1996.): 327-340.
[35] Kezia Batisai. “The Politics of Control and Ownership over Women’s bodies: Discourses that shape reproductive and sexual rights in Zimbabwe,” In *Bodies, Morals and Politics: Reflections on Sexual Reproductive Rights in Africa,* eds. Kezia Batisai, Perspectives Africa, (2015).
[36] Batisai, “The Politics of Control and Ownership over Women’s bodies,”

breasts and limbs in moral terms."[37] Public nudity was perceived by the missionaries as "a general lack of moral restraint among Africans; an outgrowth of their unbridled sexuality, and a testament to their need for Christian redemption."[38] This is an indication of the influence of Christian religion in shaping and defining women's sexuality. In contrast, however, the nakedness of African women in precolonial times was viewed more positively; it was not attached to negative connotations of sexual impurity and immorality.[39] The colonial perception of women's bodies as sexually unclean and more prone to sin meant that "women's bodies became a yardstick of morality in both traditional and religious perspectives".[40] These notions of women's bodies as sinful have prevailed in the post-colonial era.

According to Settler and Engh, "the constructions of black women's bodies as unruly and deserving of regulation persists even in the postcolonial state."[41] More often than not, this regulation of the female body is based on religious views of the female body. From a Christian perspective, "women's bodies, because they have been inscribed as a source of mystery and danger, carry the meaning and potential for disorder and chaos more than do men's bodies."[42] This has also been linked to the perception of the female body as having uncontrollable sexual urges and therefore requiring control.[43] One example of the control and regulation of the female body is seen in how Christian church sermons place emphasis on the dress code and the adornment of women. Clothes are said to "evoke intimate responses: our deepest feelings of love, the passionate expression of our sexuality."[44] Teachings on being a godly Christian woman, whether married or not, is that a Christian woman ought to dress decently in order to "preserve and protect something fragile which can easily be lost: her ability to be intimate with her husband."[45] From this it is clear how Christian religion places the onus on women to control their sexuality and yet does not

[37] B. Talton. "All the Women Must Be Clothed: The Anti-nudity Campaign in Northern Ghana, 1957-1969," In *Imagining, Writing, (Re) Reading the Black Body*, eds. Sandra Jackson, F. Demissie and M. Goodwin (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2009).
[38] Talton, "All the Women Must Be Clothed," 82
[39] Talton, "All the Women Must Be Clothed,"
[40] Batisai, "The Politics of Control and Ownership over Women's bodies," 7.
[41] Settler and Engh, "The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse in South Africa," 131.
[42] Sheffield, 2002:9
[43] Settler and Engh, "The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse in South Africa,"
[44]Samuele Bacchiocchi. *Christian dress and Adornment*. USA: Biblical perspectives, (1995).
[45] Bacchiocchi, "Christian dress and Adornment," 44.

place that kind of responsibility on men. The above may be viewed as attempts to control the sexuality of women.

From the perception of religious moralists, "by shamelessly flaunting their bodies, young women show their disregard for the body's sacredness, which should be for the intimate gaze of their husbands."[46] This perception is based on the heteronormative order of society and relationships and assumes that all women desire to have husbands. This view shows the conflict between female bodybuilders, who compete on stage in bikinis, and the religious views of the sacred female body. Bodybuilding competitions require that female participants pose on stage in a bikini, and as a result many female bodybuilders face criticism for showing their 'sacred' bodies to the public. Consequently, "nudity or the partially clothed female body is seen as part of a libidinal opportunity that threatens to unleash an unrestrained sexual energy into the world".[47] Therefore, "the moment the naked body moves from the private arena and is displayed in the public realm, it becomes marked as sexual and exposed to social conventions of policing and disciplinary apparatus."[48] This further reinforces the perception of women's bodies as 'unclean'. It is also of importance to this study of female bodybuilders as religious conceptions of their bodies police them by locating them within the private sphere. These religious conceptions of black women's bodies are in conflict with the requirements of bodybuilding competitions which place emphasis on showing the entire body on stage to be judged in front of a large audience, dressed only in a bikini. This kind of show-casing of the female body may be perceived as transgressing from religious morals.

Transgression vs Reinforcement

Female engagement in bodybuilding is often perceived as deviating from femininity and taking on a masculine image. It is often said that "hypermuscular embodiment transgresses gender norms and challenges western ideals of what it means to be female."[49] On many occasions it has been said that in as much as female bodybuilding is an act of subverting the cultural gender norms, it is also a reinforcement of new norms of how a woman's body ought to be.[50] This is due to the fact that bodybuilding competitions have certain criteria of how the muscles on a woman's body should be developed and the kind of shape that she

[46] Bakare-Yusuf, "Nudity and morality," 123.
[47] Bakare-Yusuf, "Nudity and morality," 122.
[48] Bakare-Yusuf, "Nudity and morality," 123.
[49] Felkar, "Marginalized Muscle," 40.
[50] Mc Grath and Chananie-Hill, "Big Freaky-Looking Women,"

should have. Bodybuilding competitions also have their own criteria for judging the female body. One of the criterion is that the female body should show 'symmetry'.[51] The female bodybuilder is "viewed as 'symmetrical' if her lower body is similar in proportion to her upper body".[52] The competitions also differ in terms of the categories and divisions that have their own criteria for selecting a winner; these are "standard female bodybuilders, who compete on the basis of musculature, and others who participate in one or two subcategories of women's bodybuilding called 'Fitness' and 'Figure'."[53] However, in as much as:

> [A]ll three categories involve acquiring more muscle mass than the average gym-user, the latter two, whose aim is to preserve a feminine look among participants, require far less than what is now characteristic of the standard woman bodybuilder.[54]

Getting the body to this level of low body fat requires weeks of intense training and a 'clean' diet, often consisting of reduced carbohydrates and high in protein. It is evident that female bodybuilders are constantly in a battle to uphold the mixture of opposing standards enforced by the sport; "one of masculine muscle mass and the other of murkily conceived feminine beauty."[55] They constantly have to negotiate a balance between the two. The intense training and calorie restricted diet can prove to have severe health risks and as a result, "the deprivation of carbohydrates that characterises the bodybuilder's diet, a tactic that resembles the famous Atkin's Diet, can, in its later stages, bring about mental disorientation and extreme fatigue."[56] There are many health consequences of women's engagement in bodybuilding, as a result of intense training and the reduction in calories consumed.

Female Bodybuilders and Health

Female participation in bodybuilding comes with health consequences. The health aspect often focuses on the reproductive capacity and menstrual cycle of female athletes. The monthly menstrual cycles that women undergo have always been associated with being symbolic of

[51] McTavish, "Feminist Figure Girl: Look Hot While You Fight the Patriarchy,"
[52] Worthen and Baker, "Pushing Up on the Glass Ceiling," 472.
[53] C. Lewis, "Sporting Adam's Rib: The Culture of Women Bodybuilders in America," *The Massachusetts Review,* 45(4) (2004): 604-631.
[54] Lewis, "Sporting Adam's Rib," 606.
[55] Lewis, "Sporting Adam's Rib," 607.
[56] Lewis, "Sporting Adam's Rib," 618.

femaleness.[57] This is largely due to the fact that menstruation has always been viewed as "a sign of a healthy, functional body, not one that is dysfunctional and in meltdown."[58] In many instances, however, women have often faced marginalisation from certain spaces and terrains, especially within sport because "the fact that women menstruate has been used as a justification for limiting women's activities outside of the domestic realm."[59] Their menstrual cycles have been perceived as decapacitating them and their physical capabilities remain unacknowledged. This view is aligned to the accepted societal 'fact' that "women are physically weaker than men."[60]

However, female athleticism challenge to these upheld perceptions of menstruation as female athletes, especially female bodybuilders, do not go through menstrual cycles for long periods of time due to intense training and diet. This is often referred to as the 'Female Athlete Triad'.[61] The female athlete triad is described by Thein-Nissenbaum as the "interrelatedness of energy availability, menstrual function and bone mineral density."[62] It is a condition that results through stress, irregular menstrual cycles and disordered eating behaviours.[63] Having a negative energy balance is the first disorder in the female athlete triad, followed by menstrual dysfunction and low bone mineral density (BMD).[64] Low energy availability occurs through "the setting of both caloric, restriction and excessive exercise."[65] Thein-Nissenbaum agrees with this view and goes on to say that intentional energy reduction occurs "through excessive exercise, by dramatically decreasing caloric intake, or by combining both methods."[66] Low energy is caused by more energy being used by the body than is consumed through intense exercise and a reduction in food consumed. Athlete menstrual dysfunction is the second disorder of the athlete triad and is "more common in active women."[67] Menstrual dysfunction often presents itself as "primary amenorrhea,

[57] A.E. Kissling. "When being female isn't feminine: Uta Pippig and the Menstrual Communication Taboo in Sports Journalism." *Sociology of Sports Journal,* 16 (1999): 79-97.
[58] Kissling, "When being female isn't feminine," 86.
[59] Kissling, "When being female isn't feminine," 8.
[60] A. Roth and S.A. Basow. "Femininity, Sports, and Feminism: Developing a Theory of Physical Liberation*." Journal of Sport and Social Issues,* 28 (2004): 245-265.
[61] Jill Thein-Nissenbaum. "Long term consequences of the female athlete triad." *Maturitas* 75(2) (2013):107-112.
[62] Thein-Nissenbaum, "Long term consequences of the female athlete triad," 107.
[63] Thein-Nissenbaum, "Long term consequences of the female athlete triad,"
[64] Thein-Nissenbaum, "Long term consequences of the female athlete triad,"
[65] Horn, Gergen and McGarry, 18.
[66] Thein-Nissenbaum, "Long term consequences of the female athlete triad," 108.
[67] M.M. Manore. "Dietary Recommendations and Athletic Menstrual Dysfunction," *Sports Medicine,* 32(14) (2002): 887-901.

secondary amenorrhea, or oligomenorrhea."[68] It is caused by not only energy drain but also due to "high exercise intensity."[69] In many cases, due to "a lack of energy, numerous bodily systems, including the reproductive system, go into "shut-down" mode.[70] It is obvious how female athleticism and its health consequences pose a threat to the reproductive capacity of women. This is an important observation as it links to the issue of sexual and reproductive health rights.

It is therefore important to note that "while exercise is encouraged for general health and disease prevention, female athletes are susceptible to negative health outcomes if energy balance is not maintained."[71] However, in as much as female bodybuilding may be viewed as causing amenorrhea, for female bodybuilders the loss of a period is seen as an accomplishment as it signifies that they have reached a low level of body fat being.[72]

Another health concern within bodybuilding, and particularly female bodybuilding, is the use of anabolic steroids.[73] Some of the negative effects of the use of these substances in women are "libido disorders, cachexia related to chronic disease such as human immunodeficiency virus(HIV), and anemia."[74] These negative effects contribute to the female athlete triad, as discussed above. As a result of their use of anabolic steroids, "women are predisposed to deepening of the voice, increased facial and body hair, scalp hair loss, menstrual irregularities, clitoral enlargement, and reduced breast size."[75] In the process, female bodybuilders who use anabolic steroids develop features considered masculine while they lose features which identifies them as feminine. Interestingly, these changes in the female body place emphasis on gender and how it is not a fixed identity; and that masculinity can exist in a body once understood to be feminine.

Women have historically been confined to the domestic arena because of their supposedly nurturing characteristics and their reproductive roles of bearing and looking after their children. Women's engagement in

[68] Horn, Gergen and McGarry, "The Female Athlete Triad,"
[69] Manore, "Dietary Recommendations and Athletic Menstrual Dysfunction," 889.
[70] Thein-Nissenbaum, "Long term consequences of the female athlete triad," 110.
[71] Horn, Gergen and McGarry, "The Female Athlete Triad," 18.
[72] McTavish, "Feminist Figure Girl: Look Hot While You Fight the Patriarchy,"
[73] Ip et al. "Women and Anabolic Steroids: An Analysis of a dozen users," *Clin J Sport Med*, 20(6) (2010): 475-481.
[74] Committee on Gynecologic Practice. "Performance enhancing anabolic steroid abuse in women," *Women's Health Care Physicians*,484 (2011): 1-3.
[75] Ip et al, "Women and Anabolic steroids," 475.

sport, particularly male-dominated sports such as bodybuilding, and the subsequent halt of menstrual cycles raises a challenge to society's understanding of feminine and masculine traits. Women's engagement in bodybuilding enables onlookers to see how the sport can also be an example of gender performance which is discussed below.

Gender Performance

It is worth noting how contradictory the engagement in bodybuilding is for female bodybuilders. In attempting not to perform societal imposed standards of gender, the sub-culture of bodybuilding has a performative nature especially with the sculpting of the body through strategic eating and training to meet a particular shape. This coincides with Judith Butler's notion of 'Gender Performativity' in that "gender is not a fact."[76] By this she means that gender is not a fixed concept and the behaviour associated with specific genders is determined by human beings and can therefore continuously change. It is for this reason that she believes that "what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo."[77] Gender is performed through various acts or gendered roles of how a girl and a boy should behave. As a result, "gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences"[78], while "those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished."[79] Therefore, those who go against what is the norm in terms of gendered behaviours are punished through stigmatisation and marginalisation. This is the case with female bodybuilders. A decision to embody muscle, places them in a position of difference because of their failure to perform their gender. Felkar maintains that the constructed ideologies of gender and gender performativity "exaggerate and naturalize, sex and gender as binaries which has restrained women's opportunities to embody muscle without abject."[80] When women choose to engage in bodybuilding as a way of defining themselves, they are perceived as rejecting traditional femininity in favour of masculinity.[81] The idea of performance is further portrayed in the concepts of the body being a project and having a government of the body. It is to this discussion that we now turn.

[76] Judith Butler. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, 40(4) (1988.): 519-531.
[77] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 522.
[78] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 522.
[79] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 522.
[80] Felkar, "Marginalized Muscle," 42.
[81] Duff and Hong, "Self-Images of Women Bodybuilders,"

Body Project and Government of the Body

Settler and Engh point to the idea of the body as being always "simultaneously fixed and flexible."[82] They use the example of a person in a wheelchair to show how the person is 'fixed' in the situation of being in a wheelchair but is also flexible because the person can undergo surgery as an attempt to modify the body and change its supposedly 'fixed' state.[83] The sport of female bodybuilding is also indicative of the 'fixed' and 'flexible' nature of the black female body. Religious and cultural conceptions of the female body may 'fix' it by determining how the body should be, while the transformations that women go through in building muscular physiques, shows the flexible nature of the body. Bryan Turner understands the body as "the living site where the politics of identity is inscribed."[84] This perception differs to Butler's understanding of the body as not "simply a site of inscription but also significantly, simultaneously as a site of performance."[85] The body can also be a site of resistance and self-assertion.

This resistance and self-assertion is seen in how the body becomes a location for the exercise of will over desire and "the personal achievement of personal control over diet is an act of will which enhances self-esteem."[86] This enforces Turner's idea of the 'Government of the Body' in which bodies are controlled and laboured through "eating, sleeping, cleaning, dieting; and exercising."[87] The nature of female bodybuilding clearly shows how, through intense training and strict eating, the body is regulated and controlled.[88] As Worthen and Baker state, "women involved in this sport must follow disciplined and controlled diet and training regimens in order to be successful."[89] Many female bodybuilders view this regimented physical training as "the ultimate form of claiming self-worth."[90] This is due to the fact that engagement in bodybuilding is often linked to past issues in which women had no control and this, as a result, caused them to have a low self-image and low self-esteem. However, through bodybuilding and its

[82] Settler and Engh "The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse in South Africa," 128.
[83] Settler and Engh, "The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse in South Africa,"
[84] Bryan Turner. *The Body and Society*. 3rd ed. USA: SAGE Publications, (2008).
[85] Settler and Engh, "The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse in South Africa," 132.
[86] Turner, "*The Body and Society,"* 153.
[87] Turner, 2008: "*The Body and Society,"* 161.
[88] Turner, 2008"*The Body and Society,"*
[89] Worthen and Baker, "Pushing Up on the Glass Ceiling," 474.
[90] Lewis, "Sporting Adam's Rib," 620.

demands on the body, bodybuilding becomes a liberating sport in which, although women cannot control the forces around them, they can control their bodies.[91] Therefore, diet becomes one of the few areas in which women can exercise personal control and discipline as an attempt to gain personal autonomy.[92] Since women's bodies are policed by religious and cultural conceptions of how they ought to be, the only control they seem to have over their bodies is through controlling their diet.

Chris Shilling poses the idea of the body as a 'Body Project'.[93] According to him, society has a tendency of seeing the body "as an entity which is in the process of becoming; a project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self-identity."[94] Bodybuilding as a sport also follows this premise where the aim of embodying muscle, and ensuring that certain muscles are visible, can be seen as a project because of the amount of time and effort that one applies into getting a desired body, and also because of the process of transformation that the body undergoes. According to Shilling:

> [B]odybuilding is a good illustrative example of the body as a project precisely because the quality and sheer size of the muscles achieved by bodybuilders challenges accepted notions of what is natural about male and female bodies.[95]

As a result, "an initial act of governing the body to achieve identity and autonomy is replaced by an anarchy of the body which denies the will of the subject/victim whose response is an intensified programme of dieting and exercise."[96] This intensified exercise and diet programme is a means of escaping the religious and cultural conceptions of the 'ideal body' and a way of achieving one's preferred body.

By virtue of the body being a project, Shilling proposes that it should be accepted that "its appearance, size, shape and even its contents, are potentially open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner."[97] This means that the body can "be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners."[98] This view poses a challenge to societal constructs especially within the context of black female bodybuilders

[91] Lewis, "Sporting Adam's Rib,"
[92] Turner, "The Body and Society,"
[93] C. Shilling. *The Body and Social Theory*. 2nd ed. USA: SAGE Publications, 2003.
[94] Shilling, "The Body and Social Theory," 4.
[95] Shilling, "The Body and Social Theory," 6.
[96] Turner, "The Body and Society," 164.
[97] Shilling, "The Body and Social Theory," 4.
[98] Shilling, "The Body and Social Theory," 5.

because if the body is a project that can be reconstructed by its owner, it means that religious and cultural conceptions of women's bodies fall away and have no place to influence women's choices in their pursuit of embodying muscular physiques. It would also mean challenging the belief that muscles are 'biologically male' and what this belief means for women's bodies in the world of sport.

Black Women's Bodies in Sport

Sport is another domain in which, historically, women have been prohibited from entering. Women were restricted from participating in sport because they were:

> perceived as being too weak for sport, particularly endurance sports, such as marathons, weightlifting and cycling, and it was often argued in the past that sport was harmful to women's health, particularly their reproductive health.[99]

It was the 1894 Olympic movement that denied women access into the sporting arena because the founder of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Baron Pierre de Coubertin, was vociferously opposed to women's participation in Olympic competition."[100] This is a reflection of the "dominant ideology of the nineteenth century that women were unsuited to take part in vigorous physical exercise."[101] It was only in 1924 that women were admitted and allowed to participate in the Olympic Games.[102] The prevention of women's participation ensured unequal gender representation and was further instilled by social constructions of female and male gender roles.

In many instances, "the extent to which a sport is framed as feminine or masculine controls if and how women participate in it."[103] As Rubin states, "sport is then an essential part of the engendering process and helps to entrench 'masculine' and 'feminine' signifiers and forms of behaviour through legitimating and endorsing bodies in certain

[99] United Nations (UN), "Women, Gender equality and Sport," *Women 2000 and beyond*, (2007): 2-40.
[100] J. Hargreaves, "Gender Equality in Olympic Sport: A brief story of women's setbacks and successes at the summer Olympic Games," *Aspetar Sports Medicine Journal*, (2013): 80-86.
[101] Hargreaves, "Gender Equality in Olympic Sport," 81.
[102] I. Parčina, V. Šiljak, A. Perović, and E. Plakona. "Women's Word Games." *Physical education and sport through the centuries,* 1(2) (2014): 49-60.
[103] Roth and Basow, "Femininity, Sports, and Feminism," 252.

contexts."[104] It is the sport that determines whether or not women can participate and sport also becomes one of the institutions for socialisation and enforcing how gender should be performed. Sport also faces the politics of muscle size in female bodies as it associates strength with men and weakness with women. The distinctions are clear because "the masculine ideal is one of physical strength, large size, and aggressiveness. The feminine ideal, on the other hand, is beautiful, small, thin, and perhaps most importantly, weak."[105] These perceptions become problematic for female athletes, such as the female bodybuilders, who seek a body of their preference, a body that embodies muscle, amidst these debates. Consequently, female athletes are perceived as having unnatural bodies and female athletes who are successful in their sport are said to be failing to be feminine.[106]

However, the realm of sport is also one in which gender, gender difference and gender hierarchy can not only be constructed but also challenged.[107] More women are becoming involved in sport and sport has become a lens through which women do and undo femininity. Female bodybuilders and their embodiment of muscle is an example of how women are challenging the societal gender differences and showing new ways of looking at the potential of the female body. As a result, "women who embrace their physical abilities and develop them are, in doing so, producing for themselves a degree of security that women are usually not afforded."[108] They are developing new ways of thinking about the female body and its physical capabilities subverting sexual scripts which have often portrayed females as passive and vulnerable, and males as dominant and aggressive.[109] Historically, "sport has been seen as antithetical to femininity, and sports participation as unfeminine."[110] As more women enter into the domain of sport, this appears to be a progressive move. On the other hand, women who aim to achieve the muscular and physical strength required in athleticism often find themselves in a predicament as their bodies become daily sites of struggle.

[104] M. Rubin. "The Offside Rule: Women's Bodies in Masculinised Spaces," in *Development and Dreams: The Urban legacy of the 2010 Football World Cup*, eds. U. Pillay, R. Tomlinson and O. Bass (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2009), 266-280.
[105] Roth and Basow, "Femininity, Sports, and Feminism," 249.
[106] Kissling, "When being female isn't feminine,"
[107] Kissling, "When being female isn't feminine,"
[108] Roth and Basow, "Femininity, Sports, and Feminism," 255.
[109] Roth and Basow, "Femininity, Sports, and Feminism,"
[110] Kissling, "When being female isn't feminine," 80.

Female Body as a Site of Struggle

Female bodybuilders who become "excessively" muscular might be considered non-normative. Loeto is of the view that the female body is perceived as "a cultural artefact defined and redefined overtime in response to broad cultural and historic transformations."[111] The female body is perceived as having no autonomy and dictated to by society on how it should look. The black body has historically been represented in negative ways that portray their bodies as fixed and without agency.[112] From a young age, women's experience of their bodies is as a "burden, [where] the hormonal and physiological changes the body undergoes at puberty, during menstruation and pregnancy, are felt to be fearful and mysterious."[113]

The body becomes a contested site of struggle due to patriarchal domination which "strives to exercise control by defining what beauty is, controlling the mobility of women and constructing social norms that impact on women's lived experiences."[114] This coincides with Stanciu and Christensen's argument that "female bodies become socio-cultural constructs that serve a particular cultural scheme."[115] Battles for control over the female body are fought daily through emphasis on the ideal body or body image for females. Women's bodies, especially black women's bodies, have been controlled and constructed negatively; the policing and domestication of black women's bodies still persists and this is evident by the criticism received by women, especially black women who engage in bodybuilding.

Although body image should be determined by the owner of the body, culture becomes a limiting factor in that throughout history, it has been a core belief of many African cultures that women ought to have a certain body type; a curvaceous and fuller figure.[116] As a result of being socialised from a young age about how their bodies should look, women often suffer from negative body images. In many cases, as a way of

---

[111] Loeto, "Notions of Beauty and Attractiveness," 53.
[112] Settler and Engh, "The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse in South Africa,"
[113] Iris Marion Young, "On Female Body Experience: Throwing like a girl and other essays," in *Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality*. *Studies in Feminist Philosophy*, eds. Iris Marion Young (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27-45.
[114] Loeto, "Notions of Beauty and Attractiveness," 53.
[115] Stanciu, E.L. and B. Christensen, "Controlling Women's Bodies: The Black and Veiled female body in Western Visual Culture. A Comparative View," *Analize-Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies,* 2 (2014): 1-26.
[116] Loeto, "Notions of Beauty and Attractiveness,"

conforming to the societal standards of the desired body ideal, women go through body enhancement procedures to achieve that body.[117] All of these actions indicate how gender is portrayed through performance since women go through body enhancement procedures as a way of proving their femininity within their desired body ideals. Consequently, female bodybuilders are constantly under pressure to negotiate and find a balance between their pursuit of muscle and the criticism they receive.

Negotiating a Glass Ceiling

It is often said that "women in fitness – particularly those who seek muscular strength in the weight room – may find their bodily agency limited not by biology but by ideologies of emphasised femininity that structure the upper limit on women's 'success'.[118] Women feel that their bodies are constantly policed by men and their bodies are, therefore, treated as commodities. As a result, they may have no sense of bodily agency. However, other women:

> have experienced sport and fitness as sites of power and agency where they have rejected narrow constructions of femininity and where they can embrace physical power and independence.[119]

Although women experience power and agency within bodybuilding, they are often made to feel inferior due to stigmatisation and are, therefore, under pressure to still look and behave like typical gendered women.

As a result, "despite increased empowerment, the prominent theme of female bodybuilders' experience is one of contradiction, often leading to attempts to 'balance' popular notions of femininity and muscularity."[120] In many instances, female bodybuilders are often faced with the challenge to regulate muscular size to avoid being labelled as being too big or mannish.[121] For women bodybuilders to be successful in the sport, they "must delicately negotiate the edge of the boundaries between masculinity and femininity."[122] These women work hard to obtain a hyper-feminine look in an attempt to subvert gender and sexuality confusion among the general public.[123] They do this in an attempt to

[117] Loeto, "Notions of Beauty and Attractiveness,"
[118] S.L. Dworkin, "Holding Back: Negotiating a glass ceiling on Women's muscular strength," *Sociological Perspectives*, 44(3) (2001): 333-350.
[119] Dworkin, 2001: "Holding Back," 335.
[120] Worthen and Baker, "Pushing Up on the Glass Ceiling," 473.
[121] Dworkin, "Holding Back,"
[122] Worthen and Baker, "Pushing Up on the Glass Ceiling," 472.
[123] Mc Grath and Chananie-Hill, "Big Freaky-Looking Women,"

show a balance between femininity and masculinity since they are accused of being less feminine because of their muscular bodies.

Conclusion

It is clear that bodybuilding and the pursuit of muscle is a contradiction of the cultural expectations of black women's bodies. This may be due to the perception that becoming a bodybuilder is counter-intuitive and that society demands a specific physique for both men and women. However, "the success of black women in bodybuilding offers a positive model of strong, black femininity."[124] In as much as black women's engagement in bodybuilding is associated with negative connotations, other black women within bodybuilding or those wanting to become bodybuilders, feel encouraged to become members of this sub-culture since black women show a sense of strong black femininity.

The black female body has always been a contested site of struggle. With black women deciding to engage in bodybuilding and embodying muscle as beauty identity, they face marginalisation because muscle is gendered as male and the cultural beliefs associated with female bodybuilding think of women who have muscular bodies as being less feminine and more masculine. However, these beliefs do not consider that the level of femininity of women is not determined by how they decide to construct their bodies.

Female bodybuilders argue that engaging in bodybuilding gives them a sense of control over their bodies as well as "the ability to self-create the body and transcend normative notions of sex, gender and sexuality."[125] In essence, female bodybuilding is a method by which women celebrate the female body and by so doing they can manipulate their bodies as they please without considering the oppressive patriarchal limitations. Women's engagement in bodybuilding is "redefining the whole idea of femininity by asking how far a female bodybuilder can go and still remain feminine."[126] Black female bodybuilders are providing other women with new ways of perceiving beauty and femininity that is not the same as the socialised way of thinking about what it means to be a feminine woman.

---

[124] Mc Grath & Chananie-Hill, "Big Freaky-Looking Women," 238.

[125] N. Richardson, "Flex-rated! Female bodybuilding: Feminist resistance or erotic spectacle?" *Journal of Gender Studies,* 17(4) (2008): 289-301.

[126] L. Schulze, "On the Muscle" in *Building bodies,* ed. P. Moore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 9-30.

Bibliography

Bacchiocchi, Samuele. *Christian dress and Adornment*. USA: Biblical perspectives, 1995.

Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. Nudity and morality: legislating women's bodies and dress in Nigeria In *African Sexualities: A Reader*, edited by Sylvia Tamale, 116-127. Cape Town, South Africa: Pambazuka Press, 2011.

Batisai, Kezia. The Politics of Control and Ownership over Women's bodies: Discourses that shape reproductive and sexual rights in Zimbabwe In *Bodies, Morals and Politics: Reflections on Sexual Reproductive Rights in Africa* 2: 6-11. Perspectives Africa, 2015.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40(4) (1988.): 519-531.

Duff, R. and L. Hong. "Self-Images of Women Bodybuilders." *Sociology of Sport Journal* (1) (1984.): 374-380.

Dworkin, S.L. "Holding Back: Negotiating a glass ceiling on Women's muscular strength." *Sociological Perspectives*. 44(3) (2001.): 333-350.

Felkar, V. "Marginalized Muscle: Transgression and the Female Bodybuilder." *Ignite UBC Women's and Gender Studies Undergraduate Journal* 4(1) (2012): 40-49.

Gqola, P.D. "How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender based violence in contemporary South Africa." *African Identities*. 5(1) (2007): 111-124.

Hargreaves, J. "Gender Equality in Olympic Sport: A brief story of women's setbacks and successes at the summer Olympic Games." *Aspetar Sports Medicine Journal* (2013):80-86.

Horn, E., N. Gergen, and K.A. McGarry. "The Female Athlete Triad." *Rhode Island Medical Journal.* 97(11) (2014): 18-21.

Jackson, M.T. "MeTelling: Recovering the Black Female Body." *Visual Culture & Gender* 8 (2013): 70-81.

Johnston, L. "Flexing Femininity: Female Body-builders refiguring 'the body'." *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 3(3) (1996.): 327-340.

Kissling, A.E. "When being female isn't feminine: Uta Pippig and the Menstrual Communication Taboo in Sports Journalism." *Sociology of Sports Journal* 16 (1999): 79-97.

Lewis, C. "Sporting Adam's Rib: The Culture of Women Bodybuilders in America." *The Massachusetts Review* 45(4) (2004): 604-631.

Loeto, P. "Notions of Beauty and Attractiveness." *Buwa! Feminism and Culture* 2(2) (2013): 52-57

Manore, M.M. "Dietary Recommendations and Athletic Menstrual Dysfunction." *Sports Medicine* 32(14) (2002): 887-901.

Mastamet-Mason, A. "The Saartjie Baartman's Body Shape versus the Victorian Dress: The Untold African Treasures." *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 2 (2014): 113-120.

McGrath, S. and R. Chananie-Hill. "Big Freaky-Looking Women: Normalizing Gender Transgression through Bodybuilding." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 26 (2009): 235-254.

McTavish, L. *Feminist Figure Girl: Look Hot While You Fight the Patriarchy*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2015.

Ogana, W.N. and V.B. Ojong. "The thin/thick ideal: Zulu women's body as a site of cultural and postcolonial feminist struggle." *Agenda* 27(4) (2013): 110-119.

Ogana, W.N. and V.B. Ojong. "Sexual body ideal among Zulu women: Continuity and Change.' *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 11(1) (2012): 32-48.

Parčina, I., V. Šiljak, A. Perović, and E. Plakona. "Women's Word Games." *Physical education and sport through the centuries* 1(2) (2014): 49-60.

Qureshi, S. "Displaying Sara Baartman, The 'Hottentot Venus'." *Science History Publications*. (2004): 233-257.

Richardson, N. “Flex-rated! Female bodybuilding: Feminist resistance or erotic spectacle?” *Journal of Gender Studies* 17(4) (2008): 289-301.

Roth, A. and S.A. Basow. “Femininity, Sports, and Feminism: Developing a Theory of Physical Liberation.*” Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 28 (2004): 245-265.

Rubin, M. “The Offside Rule: Women’s Bodies in Masculinised Spaces.” In *Development and Dreams: The Urban legacy of the 2010 Football World Cup*, edited by U. Pillay, R. Tomlinson and O. Bass, 266-280. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2009.

Roussel, P. and J. Griffet. “The Path Chosen by Female Bodybuilders: A Tentative Interpretation.” *Sociology of Sport Journa*l 17 (2000):130-150.

Schulze, L. “On the Muscle” In *Building bodies,* edited by P. Moore, 9-30. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Settler, F and M.H. Engh. “The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse in South Africa.” *Alternation Special Edition* 14 (2015):126-148.

Shilling, C. *The Body and Social Theory*. 2nd ed. USA: SAGE Publications, 2003.

Stanciu, E.L. and B. Christensen “Controlling Women’s Bodies: The Black and Veiled female body in Western Visual Culture. A Comparative View.” *Analize-Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies* 2 (2014): 1-26.

Talton, B. “All the Women Must Be Clothed: The Anti-nudity Campaign in Northern Ghana, 1957-1969” In *Imagining, Writing, (Re) Reading the Black Body*, edited by Sandra Jackson, F. Demissie and M. Goodwin, 81-96. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2009.

Thein-Nissenbaum, Jill. “Long term consequences of the female athlete triad.” *Maturitas* 75(2) (2013):107-112.

Turner, Bryan. *The Body and Society*. 3rd ed. USA: SAGE Publications, 2008.

United Nations (UN). "Women, Gender equality and Sport". *Women 2000 and beyond*. 2-40. (2007).

Worthen, Meredith G.F and Abby S. Baker. "Pushing Up on the Glass Ceiling of Female Muscularity: Women's Bodybuilding as Edgework." *Deviant Behavior* 37(5) (2016): 471-495.

Young, Iris Marion. "On Female Body Experience: Throwing like a girl and other essays" In *Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality*. *Studies in Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Iris Marion Young, 27-45. NewYork: Oxford University Press, 2005.

"Extending the Table": Eucharist as a Model for Feminist Food Justice[1]

Eliza Jane Getman

Abstract

This article explores the link between the ritual of communion and the practice of feeding real bodies, real food. The relationship between food and theology is implicitly and explicitly central to Christian practice. Drawing on contemporary literature (including agricultural-economic, journalistic and culinary) and through the lenses of feminist theology, the article considers ways in which food justice can be served through church communities. The importance of embodiment and mutual empowerment is emphasised through an exploration of four particular church outreach projects – two in Cape Town and two in Exeter, UK. The author explores the presence, praxis and power dynamics of the investigated church communities that contribute to alternative forms of addressing hunger within their contexts. There is a recognition of a shift from, traditional forms of charity as a gift, towards a practice of food justice as a right. And the kitchen is reclaimed as a sacred space in which to practice theological action.

Introduction: Eucharist, Motherhood and Ministry

As a mother and as an Anglican priest, I have a vested interest in feeding people and in making them feel welcome, safe and secure. The kind of mothering that ensures that a family is fed with wholesome and nutritious meals on a daily basis is not essentially women's work – but the socially constructed role is one within which feminist mothers operate.[2] Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu reminds us:

> Hunger is not a natural phenomenon. It is a man-made tragedy. People do not go hungry because there is not enough food to eat. They go hungry because the system which delivers food from the fields to our plates is broken. And now in this new age of crisis – with increasingly severe and extreme weather and dwindling natural resources feeding the world will get harder still.[3]

[1] The title of this article comes from a cookbook. Joetta Handrich Schlabach, *Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook*. Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, (1991).

[2] A discussion about motherhood and essentialism is found in my 2014 PhD thesis, South African Anglican Clergywomen Merging Ministry and Motherhood: Exploring Presence, Praxis and Power, 27-30.

[3] Leonie Joubert, *The Hungry Season: Feeding Southern African Cities*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa, (2012).

Tutu indicates implicitly that mothering work is undervalued within the broken systems of care within modern western societies. Mother earth has been exploited and the solution to eradicating hunger goes far beyond what mothers alone can provide. As an Anglican priest, Tutu also understands the symbolic provision embodied in the celebration of communion at the altar. This ritualised meal of the Eucharist glorifies mothering work. The irony is that the (glorified) symbolic mothering is still overwhelmingly the prerogative of male priests while practical (undervalued) mothering is left primarily to women.

This article documents exploratory research that I have begun as a study of the relationship between Eucharist and food security. I choose to do feminist narrative research because this approach clearly values women's real lives and work. It roots our practical theology in real lives that occur in real bodies. Our stories matter. My tone is deliberately conversational in order to be widely accessible. This article cannot draw on the full empirical outcome of the research since the process is still underway. But it attempts to introduce the topic of food and faith by presenting a theological argument for the link as well as theorising the link through a feminist lens.

My involvement as a priest of a small gathered Eucharistic community in conjunction with my on-going work of mothering my family led to this research project that is exploring the Eucharist in light of food security and food justice. It was a natural progression stemming from my PhD research ("South African Anglican Clergywomen Merging Ministry and Motherhood: Exploring Presence, Praxis and Power").[4] My thesis argues that ministry is mothering work. Emma Percy also explores these ideas at length in her book *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry* while Nicolas Slee and Stephen Burns recognise in their book *Presiding Like a Woman* that new conceptions and practices of ministry can be learned through women officiating at the altar and beyond.[5]

My current research extends that work by exploring the ways in which mothering care is provided through the provision of real food as well as the symbolic Eucharistic feast. I examine table fellowship and consider the differences between expressions of charity and practices of communion. I have chosen to write in a style that broadens the conversation beyond the strictly academic. Practical theology ought to be as accessible as possible. Christianity is "practice" as much as it is a set

[4] Elizabeth Jane Getman, *South African Anglican Clergywomen Merging Ministry And Motherhood: Exploring Presence, Praxis And Power*. University of KwaZulu Natal, 2014.
[5] Nicola Slee and Stephen Burns, eds. *Presiding Like a Woman*. London: SPCK, (2010); Emma Percy, *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry*. Farnham: Ashgate, (2014).

of beliefs. Eucharist means giving thanks. When we break bread – symbolically and around a kitchen table – we are called to practice gratitude. My training rector, Jennifer Stewart Sistig, once told me that all theology should be pastoral theology. She demonstrated that it was pointless to argue over theoretical understandings without investing loving care in real people. She taught me to practice a theology focused on peoples' real needs. This understanding was foundational to my academic theological training as well. James Cochrane, John de Gruchy and Robin Petersen's book *In Word and Deed: Towards a Practical Theology for Social Transformation* made clear that theology is grounded in the reality of the lives of "individuals and communities."[6] In this article the practice of table fellowship is observed through the overlapping lenses of mothering and the Eucharist. Both lenses provide insight into practical engagement of pastoral theology.

The context of my experience of pastoral care and practical theology is rooted in my other vocation of motherhood. To provide some background, I refer to my previous research that highlights the contribution to ministry provided by the experience and practice of mothering:

> This experience of mothering, as expressed through a nurturing presence and praxis at the altar, is a re-vindication of the necessity and the value of domestic labour. This labour happens both at the altar and in the home. The powerful witness of clergy mothers can transform the traditional institutional practices that have idealised the work of the clergy while undervaluing the same domestic work done by innumerable women (and some liberated men) on the home front. The altars of our homes include our kitchen tables which, cluttered with the mess of children and the management of family life, can be reclaimed as sacred spaces for breaking bread and enacting celebration. This work of "mothering" includes feeding, serving, mediating conflict and forgiving the "natals". Our hope as mothers who do this work conscientiously is that all concerned will deepen their experience and understanding of embodiment in order to give birth to new horizons of possibility and equity.[7]

A fundamental aim in my ministry (and in my mothering) is to continue to work towards the ambitious project of developing a feminist philosophy of religion that Grace Jantzen articulated in her book Becoming Divine. She announced therein a disruptively transformative theory of natality:

---

[6] James R. Cochrane, John W. de Gruchy & Robin Petersen, *In Word and Deed: Towards a Practical Theology for Social Transformation*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, (1991), 17.

[7] Getman, *South African Anglican Clergywomen Merging Ministry And Motherhood: Exploring Presence, Praxis And Power* ,49.

> [A] Feminist philosophy of religion based in the aim of becoming divine does a great deal more than challenge traditional aims and methods of the philosophy of religion, although it certainly does that too, especially in its diagnosis of the necrophilia of western philosophical and religious thought. It actually moves us onward from the project of modernity itself, creating a new horizon for human becoming […] in which natality can be explored as the opening of new possibilities.[8]

Inherent in Jantzen's theory of natality is the notion of the host mother who nourishes life. Feeding others is inherently sacramental. Mothers work on a daily basis to provide food and security for our families. Pregnant women shelter new life within our own bodies – feeding another body and providing a sanctuary for growth. The nourishment provided by mothers (either through breast feeding or bottles or healthy snacks or well-balanced family meals) can help bodies grow. Mothering food ought to provide a sense of safety, love and care. The notion of natality (as opposed to mortality) provides a framework for understanding that life is for flourishing, bodies are for loving and food is for sharing. I believe all priests do this mothering work when we prepare the Eucharistic table. We break a loaf of bread and pour out a jug of wine so that all may be fed. Eucharist is the quintessential celebration of love.

There is a certain sensuality and intimacy in the act of the Eucharist that affords a profound awareness of vulnerability each time I celebrate at the altar. It is a privilege to stand in this role. I am well aware it is not because of my holiness, but because of my brokenness I am able to wear this mantle of power. There is a physical porousness in this act that recalls the experience of breastfeeding my babies. There is a profoundly intimate connection to people who come with open hands to receive the body and blood of Christ. My mandate is to welcome all to the feast with the responsibility of helping people to flourish through this experience of communion. Feeding people's bodies as well as their souls and psyches is a natural extension of Eucharist. My interpretation of the Eucharist is inextricably tied to my experience of motherhood. Eucharist is about nurture and empowerment. It is about fostering relationships of divine equality. It is an enactment of food justice.

[8] Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion.* Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, (1999), 8.

Sharing the Daily Bread

The line from the Lord's Prayer "Give us this day our daily bread" has a particular resonance for those responsible for procuring and preparing and presenting meals for others. It has another resonance for those for whom food is an insecure resource. Timothy Gorringe's book *Harvest: Food, Farming and the Churches* has been written as an accessible study guide for congregations. He unpacks this phrase 'ton arton ton epiousion' - or 'daily bread' that refers back to manna from God. He says, "Prayer for daily bread, and thankfulness for food, makes absolute sense against a background of food insecurity. It makes much less sense in supermarket society."[9] Over-abundance, packaging and wastefulness contribute to a consumerism that takes food for granted. There is a lack of connection to the source of nourishment. And yet we are all hungry for more than food.

In her book *Bread of Tomorrow: Praying with the World's Poor*, Janet Morley makes a direct theological connection between "daily bread" and hungry people. She writes:

> They pray for real food, but they are also hungry for justice; they long for freedom from the intolerable burdens the international debt places on them, and look to that biblical time of jubilee when debts are remitted and justice prevails.[10]

The poor and the hungry are not only found in developing countries. Christians can practice justice locally wherever we live. The biblical imperative to feed the hungry makes the move from Eucharist to food justice a natural step. Metaphor and symbolism help us to imagine and build the kitchen in which justice can begin to be served. In fact, the geographical location of parish churches in the United Kingdom provides an opportunity for addressing food insecurity and practicing food justice. In a 2015 report for "Church Network Responses to Poverty", the editors explain why parish churches can make a significant contribution in their communities:

> Churches are uniquely placed to build networks against poverty. The Church of England's parish structure commits it to neighbourhoods the length and breadth of the country where Christians of other denominations are also faithfully present. Being communities of

[9] Timothy Gorringe, *Harvest: Food, Farming and the Churches.* London: SPCK, (2006), 58.
[10] Janet Morley, ed. *Bread of Tomorrow: Praying with the World's Poor*. London: SPCK & Christian Aid, (1992).

> equals, churches are able to transform top-down service delivery structures into relationships of trust.[11]

While churches may strive to be communities of equals where relationships of trust thrive, this cannot be assumed or taken for granted. In their paper, *Christianity and Food: Recent Scholarly Trends*, Barbara Patterson and Shirley Banks ask the most critical question: "what's being served on and around the table but also to and with whom?"[12] We need to query what we are eating and where it comes from and who is welcome at the table. Who cooks? Who eats? Who cleans up? These are all profoundly theological questions.

Sara Miles presents an inspiring example of food justice in her spiritual memoir *Take this Bread: A Radical Conversion.* In it she articulates her faith journey from adult atheist to practicing Christian and the parallel creation of a food pantry at the altar in the Episcopal Church St Gregory of Nyssa where she worships. Miles recounts the significance of her first communion in the following words:

> Eating Jesus, as I did that day to my great astonishment, led me against all my expectations to a faith that I'd scorned and work I'd never imagined. The mysterious sacrament turned out to be not a symbolic wafer at all but actual food – indeed the bread of life. In that shocking moment of communion, filled with a deep desire to reach for and become part of a body, I realized that what I'd been doing with my life all along was what I was meant to do: feed people.And so I did. I took communion, I passed the bread to others, and then I kept going, compelled to find new ways to share what I'd experienced. I started a food pantry and gave away literally tons of fruit and vegetables and cereal around the same altar where I'd first received the body of Christ.[13]

Her unassumingly ambitious project now feeds thousands of people. It is a natural extension of the Eucharist and the gospel message that says, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). This way of understanding and practicing Christianity is not an optional extra. It is central to faithful living. As Miles so aptly states:

> The food pantry was our church and in it we translated the sacraments, and key Christian rites in often unorthodox ways. In doing so, I'd come to see that we were sharing in the ongoing work of all believers, and

---

[11] David Grumett and Bethany Eckley, eds. *Creating Conversations: Exploring Community-Based Responses to Poverty*. University of Edinburgh, (2015), 1.

[12] Barbara Patterson and Shirley Banks, "Christianity and Food: Recent Scholarly Trends," *Religion Compass*, 7 no.10 (2013): 433–440.

[13] Sara Miles, *Take This Bread*: *A Radical Conversion*. New York: Ballantine Books, (2007), xiii.

> that we were helping make the larger church new, even as we were ourselves being transformed.[14]

Miles dares to call it Eucharist. And yet this is not so radical a practice. Agape feasts, as evidenced in the New Testament, were shared by early Christian communities (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7-11).[15] The Last Supper was, after all, a real meal, not simply a symbolic one.

The Sites of Research and the Evolution of the Concept

I have identified four Anglican churches, two cathedrals and two parish churches) that have practiced both Eucharist and community outreach in the form of soup kitchens or similar projects. There are people in these sacred spaces translating the ritual practice of mothering through food (symbolically shared in the Eucharist) in wider ways that extend the table. St Peter's Cathedral in Exeter, Devon, UK and St George's Cathedral in Cape Town have much in common, and could develop links around Eucharistic practice and table fellowship. St George's has a significant social justice history through its resistance to the apartheid government and is known as the "People's Cathedral" in the Mother City.[16] St Peter's Cathedral was selected since I am currently part of the clergy team.[17] Each Wednesday evening there is a *Homeless Café* in the outbuilding chapel called the Chapter House. St David's Parish Church in Exeter has run a soup kitchen on Thursday evenings since 2002.[18] Finally, St Peter's Church in Mowbray, Cape Town has been hosting a *Community Supper* for the past five years that explicitly challenges the traditional donor/recipient power dynamics. On Thursday evenings, up to eighty homeless people come to the church hall to be served as dinner guests.[19] These four communities provide points of entry towards a larger experience of communion and community.

My family moved to Exeter from South Africa in 2016. I started attending the evening services at Exeter Cathedral as a parishioner – but through a series of unexpected events and circumstances, I have become the volunteer de facto priest-in-charge of the evening *Sundays@7 service*. It was a natural progression to get involved with the Wednesday *Homeless Café* as well – where baked potatoes and hot drinks are served instead

[14] Miles, "Take this bread," 227.
[15] Trevor Lloyd, *Agapes and Informal Eucharists*. Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship no.19. Bramcott, Notts: Grove Books, (1973).
[16] St. Georges Cathedral: The people's cathedral http://sgcathedral.co.za
[17] Exeter Cathedral http://www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk
[18] St David's Church Exeter http://stdavidschurchexeter.org.uk
[19] St Peter's Church, Mowbray https://stpetersmowbray.wordpress.com/mission/

of bread and wine. This led to discussions about extending the table even further.

I initiated conversations with people in leadership at the four designated communities about their different modus operandi. Then residential canon, Anna Norman-Walker, was one of the founding organisers of both the *Sundays@7* service in the Cathedral and the *Homeless Café*. Both of these services take place in the Cathedral Chapter House. Symbolically and theologically, Sundays and Wednesdays were part of the same continuum. Anna and I spoke of the parallels between these services and Sara Miles' food pantry at St Gregory of Nyssa Church in San Francisco. Also, I began corresponding with the poet dean of St George's Cathedral in Cape Town to discuss his community's involvement with food distribution. His reply follows:

> We had to close our soup kitchen. It was outsourced charity in that did not involve the clergy or the congregation other than in the form of donations. But the main reason was that of security: The gangsters heading to and from the courts on Keerom Street would feast at the cathedral and then rob all souls within their pilfering and often life-threatening nearness […] we are planning to start a food kitchen (food for all must be sexy - preferably curry. Soup has such a pervasively sad, impoverishing presence in our lives).[20]

Making plans for food kitchens is a way to work towards building community. People need to eat and people who serve each other tend to eat better and have the added benefit of conversation and recognition and hopefully mutual respect.

Food and Theology

David Grumett and Rachel Muers' *Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat and the Christian Diet* grapples with historical practice and present identity in an accessible way. They reflect on current unhealthy understandings of food consumption (with a destructive environmental and economic impact) and they promote a more just and sustainable diet. They "offer not so much a dietary prescription for healthy food practices as an annotated book of recipes."[21] These practices and recipes are rooted firmly in practical theology. Other voices in this contemporary theological conversation include Norman Wirzba and Angel Méndez-Montoya who discuss the meaning of food and eating in the context of the Eucharist and beyond. Wirzba's preface in *Food and*

[20] From a private electronic correspondence in July 2017.
[21] David Grumett and Rachel Muers. *Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat and the Christian Diet*. Oxon: Routledge, (2010), 149.

Faith: A Theology of Eating speaks of a memorable meal and Méndez-Montoya includes a recipe in The *Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* as an example of alimentary theology.[22] Méndez-Montoya articulates a vision of "alimentary theology as a practice of power that is non-coercive, but communal, rooted in nurturing, loving care for one another, and imitating God's own radical gesture of love."[23] Wirzba has coined and explained the term "Eucharistic eating". He clearly understands that Eucharist can extend through eating into the wholeness of life:

> […] Eucharistic eating alters the relationships that make up our lives, gives them a self-offering character, and in doing so changes the practice of life itself. Though physiological eating continues as a biological necessity, the look and feel of life changes because the relationships that make life possible have been transformed.[24]

Wirzba and Méndez-Montoya both incorporate the preference for practice over belief in order to foster a sense of belonging. Both recognise the power of the Eucharist to change how we live from day to day. In contrast to transformative Eucharistic eating, Ernst Conradie in his article "What Do We Do When We Eat?" raises the possibility that in some contexts (non-Eucharistic) eating can demonstrate and even reinforce white male supremacy. He notes the South African traditions of "hunting, braaing and eating". He also recalls the forced feeding of abducted Africans on slave ships. In both examples, food is about domination.[25]

All of these authors address important issues around food and theology. This is engaged practical theology. It leads to further practical questions. What happens when we eat *together*. And what are people really hungry for? And who is feeding whom? Who gets to eat and who is left out? Who is sacrificed? How do we break bread and share beyond the Eucharist? Can we find examples of Eucharistic eating that help to overcome the isolation and loneliness of our modern era? These and other questions can only be addressed in the context of Eucharistic practice and table fellowship.

---

[22] Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*. New York: Cambridge University Press, (2011), xi.And Angel F. Méndez-Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*. 12-13

[23] Méndez-Montoya, "Food and Faith," 43.

[24] Wirzba, "Food and Faith," 155.

[25] Ernst M Conradie, "What Do We Do When We Eat? Part I: An Inconclusive Inquiry," *Scriptura,* 115 (2016): 1-17.

A Kitchen in the Sanctuary and a Sanctuary in the Kitchen

With an understanding of Eucharist as food justice, it seems most appropriate that Exeter Cathedral's *Homeless Café* gathers in the same sacred space that is used for evening Eucharistic services. On Wednesdays there are around fifty people who sleep rough and/or experience hunger who come for a baked potato with toppings, a hot drink and a warm welcome. While it is true that the volunteers who serve tend to be well fed, the organisers are conscious of the power dynamics around charitable giving and try to foster a sense of community that is not patronising.

Sacred spaces can lend themselves to being portals to the divine. The Sunday altar is replaced with Wednesday dinner tables that are in turn replaced with the altar. 'A kitchen in the sanctuary' resonates with Barbara Brown Taylor's book *An Altar in the World*. She writes about embodied practices that can lead us deeper into the mystery of faith in the context of our own particular lives:

> To make bread or love, to dig in the earth, to feed an animal or cook for a stranger—these activities require no extensive commentary, no lucid theology. All they require is someone willing to bend, reach, chop, stir. Most of these tasks are so full of pleasure that there is no need to complicate things by calling them holy. And yet these are the same activities that change lives, sometimes all at once and sometimes more slowly, the way dripping water changes stone. In a world where faith is often construed as a way of thinking, bodily practices remind the willing that faith is a way of life.[26]

To think about food security and Eucharist is to think (and act) in a theologically embodied way – as opposed to a theologically abstract way. This kind of practical application and engagement is a cornerstone of feminist theology. Letty Russell's *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* emphasises the equal partnership and sharing of all members of the community. Likewise in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology,* Rosemary Radford Ruether transforms systematic feminist theology by closely examining biblical teaching. She contrasts patriarchal with embodied understanding and, in so doing, helps women to make informed choices about our engagement within family, church and wider community. Denise Ackermann also insists on embodied theology and deliberately wrote *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith* for her loved ones and "for the general

[26] Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009, xviii.

reader, for people in the churches, as well as for anyone else who might be interested in the theological reflections of a white woman on the life of faith."[27] Ruether rightly described Ackermann's book "theology with its feet on the ground."[28] Likewise, practicing food security is Eucharist with its feet on the ground.

Cooking has long been a practice of embodied prayer for me. I love to cook and to feed people. Making food to share with those who want to sit at the table and be in conversation and community is one of the greatest pleasures in my life. I have a culinary library that competes for space with my theological library. Recently I have started to see that the collections have much in common. Food justice brings them closer together. Eucharist erases the artificial divisions.

For this particular research project, I even bought cookbooks as theological resources. Gill Meller's book *Gather* promotes "a philosophy for a more mindful way to cook and to eat."[29] Meller's cooking is linked with his local landscape (and seascape) and his recipe choices celebrate the abundance of British wild and farmed seasonal produce.

This multilayered word, 'gather', with all its significance and implications, has helped me to find a way to make the most of the food that I eat with my family and friends. It has given me a path to tread that makes sense to me as a cook, and it has given me a genuine appreciation for the happiness that sharing food with other people can bring.[30]

One of my old reliable cookbooks, *Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook*, was commissioned by the Mennonite Central Committee and is compiled of contributions from missionaries. In the foreword, Paul Longacre writes:

> The stories and recipes help us to enter into the lives and situations of these people and be changed by them in significant ways. Food is a medium of communication, but it is more; in a mysterious way, it is part of the message, as Jesus so vividly portrayed in the breaking of the bread and distribution of the cup.[31]

---

[27] Denise M. Ackermann, *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith*. Cambridge: Eerdmans & David Philip Publishers, (2003), xii.
[28] Ackermann, "After the Locusts," back cover.
[29] Gill Meller, *Gather: Everyday Seasonal Recipes from a Year in Our Landscapes*. London: Quadrille, (2016), 9.
[30] Meller, "Gather," 7.
[31] Schlabach, "Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook," 7.

The respect and tenderness that are conveyed in the stories point to a shift away from the dualistic 'us and them' mentality that so often occurs between the 'privileged' and the 'needy'. Hunger is intrinsically part of what it means to be human. We all live in bodies that need to eat. We can connect with each other through feeding each other and eating together. This is precisely why I take issue with Dean Michael Weeder's assessment that soup has sad connotations. Soup for me is rich and welcoming. I fed myself (and so many others) with vats of soup through my university years in cold Montreal. Even now in my home kitchen, I have a habit of cooking big pots of soup and inviting people to come and eat at my table. Some of my most significant experiences of pastoral care have taken place in the sanctuary of the kitchen.

The current renovation of the St David's church brings us back to the notion of a kitchen in the sanctuary. Many of the old pews have been removed and a kitchen is being installed within the worship space. An example of a successful café housed in an active church is the *Café@All* Saints in Hereford.[32] One of St David's churchwardens had the vision for outreach and income generation and it is easy to imagine the existing weekly soup kitchen flourishing in the sanctuary. A newly installed kitchen could become the location in which to practice alimentary theology. If the altar where the bread is broken is a sacred space, why not also the oven in which that same bread is baked?

Practicing Food Justice Instead of Charity

The Hungry Season: Feeding Southern Africa's Cities by Leonie Joubert is an important contemporary secular glimpse into the social problem of hunger. It offers a stark contrast to the idyllic reality that Meller's cookbook presents. Joubert's book "visits eight families in eight cities across the region and tells the story of food security through their own stomachs."[33] It "concludes with a discussion of possible solutions to the many challenges to the modern food system and how we might work to improve food and national security, particularly for the urban poor."[34] In a geographical region where the inequality gap looms large, obscene abundance is juxtaposed with acute malnutrition.

People across the economic spectrum can practice food justice. Craig Stewart is the director of The Warehouse in Cape Town. He believes that social development should not be charity – it must be mutually beneficial

[32] http://www.cafeatallsaints.co.uk
[33] Joubert, "The Hungry Season: Feeding Southern Africa's Cities," 14.
[34] Joubert, "The Hungry Season: Feeding Southern Africa's Cities," 17.

and sustainable. The organisation's motto is "serving the church in its response to poverty, injustice and division."[35] Their mission is to work broadly with local churches towards practical action and transformed attitudes. Craig wrote an article on his blog called *Good Food God Food* reflecting on the theology of food and a food co-op founded by his wife Liesl.[36]

Liesl Stewart is a founding member and organiser of a good food co-op in the Cape Town southern suburbs. This group has managed to reorganise successfully the bulk of their food shopping by going directly to the producers and cutting out unethical food retailers. She explains the rationale and the way it works:

> We're trying to close the gap and buy food from as close to the source as possible. I don't believe good, ethically-produced food has to be a budget-breaker. But I do believe it's mainly possible through sharing information, and banding together to get more bang for our buck.[37]

Liesl introduced me to the critically important work of Tracy Ledger. Her book *An Empty Plate: Why we are losing the battle for our food system, why it matters, and how we can win it back* is an analysis of the agri-food system and industry and government policy in South Africa. Ledger explains the meaning of her title that goes beyond food: "It is about the absence of care, the absence of dignity and the absence of kindness. These are the real moral evils of our food system."[38] She challenges us all to use food justice to work towards a genuinely equitable society. Ledger emphasises morality and mutual respect. She emphasises that charity can do more harm than good because it overlooks the fact that food is a right not a gift and that the poor and hungry are not less worthy (or less intelligent) than the wealthy and well-fed.

Craig and Liesl Stewart with others have brought the fundamental values of social justice and mutual respect (as well as a critical re-examination of power dynamics) to the *Community Supper* on Thursday evenings at St Peter's Church in Mowbray, Cape Town. They helped to found this service in February 2011 and it has been identified as a "fresh

---

[35] Stewart, Craig. "Good Food God Food," http://www.warehouse.org.za

[36] Stewart, Craig. "Good Food God Food," http://www.warehouse.org.za/index.php/site/article/good-food-god-food1

[37] Stewart, Craig. "Good Food God Food," http://www.warehouse.org.za/index.php/site/article/good-food-god-food1

[38] Tracy Ledger, *An Empty Plate: Why we are losing the battle for our food system, why it matters, and how we can win it back*. Auckland Park: Jacana Media, (2016), 196.

expression" of church.[39] While the *Community Supper* obviously serves a charitable purpose for the local homeless population, the Stewart family participate because this is their faith community. Liesl says that she is far more at home here than in the slick Sunday morning performance. The *Community Supper* is not an exercise in proselytisation. It is an experience of nurture and hospitality and commonality. It is a celebration of human dignity. As Craig says, it is about "eating a meal together with the intention of forming an ecclesial community."[40] I experienced this chaotic and unlikely community (with a fair number of intoxicated and unwashed bodies) as an extension of the Eucharist. It challenges social divisions and it pushes the boundaries of comfort zones. It is a stark reminder of our common human vulnerability and abundant need.

Mutual Vulnerability and Reciprocal Need

I started this project with a good dose of high-minded altruistic Christian optimism and patronising idealism. I have been reminded that churches alone cannot resolve the deeper political issues surrounding food justice. Ledger highlights the systemic problem of food inaccessibility that is compounded by charity.[41] Soup kitchens can undermine the dignity of those who must ask for food - because food should not be used as a charitable gift. Access to healthy food is a human right. However, in the Eucharist and at the *Community Supper* and at the *Homeless Café* – with curry and lasagne and baked potatoes and bowls of soup shared – we can recognise each other's humanity and our mutual vulnerability. We can advocate and model something different through Eucharistic practice and table fellowship. I am profoundly aware that not only poor people are hungry. Janet Morley recognises the neediness of those who want to be the benefactors:

> *God of the poor,*
> *we long to meet you*
> *yet almost miss you;*
> *we strive to help you*
> *yet only discover our need.*
> *Interrupt our comfort*

[39] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3C7IH-khwjk see also
Aldous, Ben. "Reflections of the Community Supper at St Peter's Mowbray: A Juncture of Ecclesial Liminality," https://jazzgoat10.wordpress.com/2015/10/20/reflections-on-the-community-supper-at-st-peters-mowbray-a-juncture-of-ecclesial-liminality/

[40] Interview by Ben Aldous with Craig Stewart, Rosebank, Cape Town, 19 September 2017

[41] Ledger, "An Empty plate," 104-123.

with your nakedness,
touch our possessiveness
with your poverty,
and surprise our guilt
with the grace of your welcome
In Jesus Christ, Amen.[42]

Food justice makes good Christian sense. As Wirzba explains, "Where life is broken, degraded or hungry, Jesus repairs life, showing it to us as reconciled, protected, and fed."[43] He continues:

> The ministries of Christ demonstrate that the path to full or abundant life is not a magical path. It is a practical journey that begins with eating. The gospels frequently show Jesus eating with people because table fellowship is among the most powerful ways we know to extend and share in each other's lives. Jesus eats with strangers and outcasts, demonstrating that table fellowship is for the nurture of others and not simply for self-enhancement (Luke 14:12-14). Jesus rejects the social systems of rejection and exclusion by welcoming everyone into communion with him. Table fellowship makes possible genuine encounters with others.[44]

Ancient Hebrew ritual purity laws around food were designed for exclusion. Jesus positively transgressed the divisions that kept people apart and he welcomed all people to eat freely in his company. Likewise, Eucharist breaks down all barriers and can open our hearts and our minds to new possibilities. As a mother and as a priest I am captivated by the metaphor and practice of feeding people – both, around the kitchen table, and at the altar. I want to promote a culture and practice of inclusive church and open table. I seek to learn from others who share this ethos. Like so many Christian high holy days, this holy conversation is a moveable feast. We are not only what we eat – we belong to those with whom we eat. We are required to trust each other and take some kind of mutual responsibility for each other. The following invitation to communion articulates the transformative power of the Eucharist: "Draw near. Behold who we are. May we become what we receive."[45]

---

[42] Janet Morley, *Bread of Tomorrow: Praying with the World's Poor*. London: SPCK and Christian Aid, (1992), 38.
[43] Wirzba, "Food and faith," 147.
[44] Wirzba, "Food and faith," 147-148.
[45] This was used at the Eucharist celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Ordination of women priests in Southern Africa, at the Kopanong Conference Centre, Johannesburg on 27 September 2017.

Conclusion

Food justice can be practiced in the sanctuary, in the church hall and in the kitchen. Mutual vulnerability and reciprocal need can be recognised and addressed at church and at home. It is not only the poor and the homeless who have abundant needs. The Eucharistic commission is to build relationships of trust in communities of equals. The *Homeless Café* in Exeter and the *Community Supper* in Mowbray are both examples of table fellowship that break down barriers and promote alternative engagement between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Whether we are hosts or guests or members of the family, we all come hungry to the table. All parties have much to gain through the exchange. Those who gather for the Eucharist admit our need and vulnerability when we open our hands to receive the bread. Those who come for a plate of food do likewise.

The context (location, personnel, circumstances, power dynamics, etc.) of each particular church can lead to a wide spectrum of appropriate possibilities. My research began with a naïve (and perhaps arrogant) intention of encouraging best practice, but I have realised that there are no easy or pat answers. Theology cannot be imposed. I learned from the curate at St David's Church in Exeter that their soup kitchen organisers want nothing to do with theological underpinnings. They see their project as entirely secular and do not want the clergy involved. They certainly do not want this to be understood to be a church service. Although they use the church undercroft space, this is a separate initiative. Quite the opposite is true at St Peter's *Community Supper* in Mowbray, Cape Town. The clergy and lay ministers actually enter the number of guests (often in the region of eighty homeless people) into the weekly service logbook. Sometimes a little communion service takes place at the end of the supper. However, whether or not, formal Eucharist occurs, the *Community Supper* is practiced as an Agape.

How can my work as a mother and as a priest make any difference to empowering the hungry? Perhaps the first step has been in recognising my own hunger. Egyptian-American journalist Mona Eltahawy says, "The most subversive thing a woman can do is talk about her life as if it really matters."[46] My aim is to teach my family of boys how to take care of themselves and others. My husband understands that mothering needs to be a joint responsibility – and he has become a reasonably good and willing cook. In fact, when I am busy with church and para-church

[46] Mona Eltahawy, *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution.* London: Hachette, (2015).

activities, he is in charge of our kitchen. This is important modelling for our four sons.

This article serves as a brief introduction to my on-going research in Exeter and Cape Town. I will continue exploring presence, praxis and power dynamics at St Peter's Cathedral and St David's Parish Church in Exeter – and at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town and St Peter's Parish Church in Mowbray. But I am letting go of my agendas and my preconceived ideas. I have no idea where this conversation with co-conspirators may lead. The unknowing is the heart of this project. As we eat and speak and dream together, the research participants are helping to shape the emerging outcomes. In the process we give thanks for the ways in which we nourish, challenge and change each other's lives.

Bibliography

Books:

Ackermann, Denise M. *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans & David Philip Publishers, 2003.

Cochrane, James R., de Gruchy, John W. & Peterson, Robin, *In Word and Deed: Towards a Practical Theology for Social Transformation*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991

Dudley, Karen. *A Week in the Kitchen*. Auckland Park: Jacana, 2012.

Eltahawy, Mona. *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution*. London: Hachette, 2015.

Gay, Roxane. *Hunger*. London: Corsair, 2017.

Gorringe, Timothy. *Harvest: Food, Farming and the Churches.* London: SPCK, 2006.

Grumett, David and Rachel Muers. *Theology on the Menu: Ascetism, Meat and the Christian Diet*. Abingdon,Oxon: Routledge, 2010.

Jantzen, Grace M. *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion.* Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Joubert, Leonie. *The Hungry Season: Feeding Southern African Cities*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2012.

King, Nicholas. *The New Testament (Freshly Translated)*, Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 2006.

Ledger, Tracy. *An Empty Plate: Why we are losing the battle for our food system, why it matters, and how we can win it back*. Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2016.

Meller, Gill. *Gather: Everyday Seasonal Recipes from a Year in Our Landscapes,* London: Quadrille, 2016.

Méndez-Montoya, Angel F. *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Miles, Sara. *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2007.

Morley, Janet, ed. *Bread of Tomorrow: Praying with the World's Poor*, London: SPCK and Christian Aid, 1992.

Percy, Emma. *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Sexism and God-talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.

Russell, Letty. *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church,* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

Schlabach, Joetta Handrich. *Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook*, Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1991.

Slee, Nicola and Stephen Burns, eds., *Presiding Like a Woman*, London: SPCK, 2010.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*, New York: HarperOne (HarperCollins), 2009.

Wirzba, Norman. *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Journal Articles:

Conradie, Ernst M. “What Do We Do When We Eat? Part I: An Inconclusive Inquiry.” *Scriptura* 115 *(2016:1), pp. 1-17.*

Patterson, Barbara and Shirley Banks. “Christianity and Food: Recent Scholarly Trends.” *Religion Compass* 7/10 (2013): 433–443.

Booklets:

Grumett, David and Bethany Eckley, eds. *Creating Conversations: Exploring Community-Based Responses to Poverty*, University of Edinburgh 2015.

Lloyd, Trevor. *Agapes and Informal Eucharists*. Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship No. 19. Grove Books, Bramcott, Notts, 1973.

Internet Articles and Links:

Aldous, Ben. “Reflections of the Community Supper at St Peter’s Mowbray: A Juncture of Ecclesial Liminality,” https://jazzgoat10.wordpress.com/2015/10/20/reflections-on-the-community-supper-at-st-peters-mowbray-a-juncture-of-ecclesial-liminality/ (accessed 1 October 2017)

Stewart, Craig. “Good Food God Food,”

http://www.warehouse.org.za/index.php/site/article/good-food-god-food1 (accessed 10 September 2017)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3C7IH-khwjk (accessed 1 October 2017)

43-67 Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa *Vol. 23 No 2 (Dec. 2017)*

Islam, Muslims and Politics of Queerness in Cape Town

Mujahid Osman[1] and Sa'diyya Shaikh[2]

Abstract

For many queer Muslims, there is an intense struggle between sexual identity and religious affiliation, exacerbated by broader global discourses of Islamophobia in the 'Global North' and queerphobia within Muslim communities. Based on this intersectional location, we critically examine queerphobia debates in relation to the context of Muslims in South Africa. Our approach is informed by Jasbir K. Puar's (2007), critique of the prevailing "*Queer as Regulatory"* formation, where a liberated queerness is defined by resistance to religious norms, rather than a reformation or a broader set of engagements with these norms. In this regard, we examine modalities of being queer that reside outside of such regulatory frameworks, as reflected in the activities and work of *The Inner Circle* (TIC), a South African queer Muslim community. A core objective of the TIC is social and spiritual transformation that includes faith-based reflections on the lives of queer Muslims situated at the complex intersections of Islam, sexual orientation and gender identity. We examine TIC's approach of presenting progressive interpretations of the Qur'an as a primary source of religious identity, making a claim to the deepest spiritual and authoritative source of Islam, and the ways in which they challenge gender and sexual discrimination within the broader Muslim community.

Introduction

Within contemporary Muslim societies, particularly South Africa, there are a variety of positions with regards to sexual diversity, homosexuality, queerness,[3] and rights for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,

[1] Mujahid Osman is reading towards a Masters in Global Affairs, with a concentration in International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, United States. He completed his Bachelor of Social Science Honours degree in 2016 with a specialisation in Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town. E-mail: <mosman1@nd.edu >.

[2] Sa'diyya Skaikh is Associate Professor in the study of Religion and Head of Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. E-mail: <sadiyya.shaikh@uct.ac.za>

[3] Within the literature, there are a variety of definitions for the term 'queer'. On the one hand, the term could indicate anything that is non-normative – economic system, political orientation or theological tendency. On the other hand, it could also indicate a broader umbrella category for gender and sexual minorities and an embracing term of the LGBTIQA (Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Asexual) communities. Within the context of this paper, we will be using the term to indicate the latter meaning. However, this paper will mainly focus on same-sex sexuality.

Intersex and Asexual (LGTBQIA) communities.[4] Despite the invariable complexity of this social phenomenon, for conceptual clarity one might situate the existing South Africa Muslim community's approach to sexual diversity on a spectrum. On the far right of this spectrum is an underlying virulent queerphobia which appears to intermittently erupt in parts of the community on occasion. This approach is exemplified in a statement by Mufti Bayat, a traditional religious leader and former spokesperson of the Jamiatul `Ulama', KwaZulu-Natal[5] during debates on the same-sex marriages bill in South Africa. He argued that same-sex unions constituted:

> a violation of the limits prescribed by the Almighty, a reversal of the natural order, a moral disorder and a crime against humanity. No person is born a homosexual, just like no person is born a thief, a liar or murderer.[6]

Thus, for Mufti Bayat, homosexuality is learnt and socially acquired – it is a destructive moral vice that can be rooted out and remedied. On the opposite side, at the far left of the Muslim spectrum, is a comprehensive acceptance and embrace of queerness and queer identities. The Inner Circle, a queer Muslim organisation based in Cape Town, embodies this

---

[4] For a report that presents an overview of communal positions and contestations on sexual diversity in South Africa, see Moses Tofa's, The Narratives of Islam and Sexual Diversity: An Anatomy of Attitudes, Challenges, Opportunities and Trends in the South African Context (Research Report), Cape Town: The Inner Circle, (2014), See online at: http://theinnercircle.org.za/assets/tic-research-report-2014.pdf [Accessed 8 October 2017] For an autobiographical mapping of some of the debates, see Pepe Hendricks's edited volume, Hijab: Unveiling Queer Muslim Lives (Cape Town: The Inner Circle, 2009). Also see, Gabeba Baderoon, "'I Compose Myself': Lesbian Muslim Autobiographies and the Craft of Self-Writing in South Africa," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 83, no.4 (2015):897–915. For cogent insight into the theological and legal debates, see Scott Kugle's Homosexuality in Islam (London: Oneworld Publications, 2010). Finally, for a sociological mapping of queer Muslim subjectivities see Scott Kugle's book Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

[5] Among South African Muslim clerical bodies, the Jamiatul `Ulama' occupies a central position as an authoritative Sunni theological and legal organisation with offices in Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal. It has strong alliances with other orthodox religious bodies in the country and is a member of the broader United `Ulama' Council of South Africa (UUCSA). The latter was founded in 1994, and served to bring together the different orthodox Muslim religious leaders and organisations in South Africa. In terms of the politics of UUCSA, Jamiatul `Ulama' and the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) both occupy critical and powerful positions of authority in terms of their respective communities.

[6] Muhsin Hendricks, "A Way Forward through Ijtihad: A Muslim Perspective on Same-Sex Marriage," in *To Have and To Hold: The Making of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa*, eds. Melanie Judge, Anthony Manio, and Shaun de Waal (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009), 224.

inclusive Muslim queer ethic, which actively coheres diverse sexual expressions with Muslim faith, beliefs, practice and communal belonging.[7] At the centre of the spectrum are two main positions. Right of centre, are those whose approach reflect some iteration of a "don't ask, don't tell" position, with specific types of inflections. Implicitly accepting gay people, some stereotypical tropes nevertheless prevail in these discourses. These include: gay people are creative, good dress-makers, fabulous hairdressers, and great friends for their entertainment value. Left of the centre is simply a communal silence, sometimes with support for individual gay friends or family. Cognisant of this range of positions, this paper primarily focuses on the approach of those affiliated with The Inner Circle (TIC), a LGBTQI Muslim organisation, to examine queer Muslim subjectivities in a local South African context.

In this paper, we do four things. First, to situate the debates surrounding queer Muslims, we briefly present some elements in the contemporary politics of queerness and Islam, drawing on the astute theoretical interventions of queer theorist, Jasbir K. Puar (2007). In particular, we focus on her critique of dominant secular constructs of the queer liberal subject whose emancipation demands a rejection of religion. Second, we connect these debates to the location, work and politics of The Inner Circle (TIC) as a case study within Cape Town and the varying ways that it transgresses or complies with prevailing modes of queerness as theorised by Puar. Third, we critically discuss the religious and theological perspectives embraced by the TIC, including its ways of engaging central forms of scriptural, and moral authority with the practical, contextual and lived realities of their queer community. Fourth, we outline the broader context and the troubling of heteronormativity within the 'mainstream' Muslim community in the Cape, in light of controversies sparked by the launch of a new mosque (The Open Mosque) in 2014. The latter was confused with TIC and this initiated intense public debates on religion, sexual diversity and authority within the community.

[7] On 22 May 2017, The Inner Circle, publically announced in an email communication to members and allies, that it was reconstituting as a larger entity called "Al-Fitrah Foundation", due to issues of financial sustainability in the long-term. This new entity as a broader umbrella would include the ongoing work of the Inner Circle, in addition to a number of income-generating projects like a retreat centre, a health and wellness division, and a learning academy. However this transition is still in process, and the latter have not yet materialised. The organisation's public presence on social media still retains the name TIC. We will thus continue to refer to the organisation as The Inner Circle (TIC) given the timeline of our analysis.

The Politics of Queerness

A number of popular contemporary discourses suggest that queerphobia is characteristic of all Muslims societies, and Islam is depicted as a religion intrinsically hostile, antagonistic and oppressive to people who are involved in same-sex relationships. More broadly, this large-scale essentialism, as noted by Mahomed and Esack (2017), is premised on "a crude perspective that pitches a sexually liberal and tolerant west against a sexually oppressive and intolerant Islam."[8] Echoing an earlier Orientalist approach, this binary serves right-wing political agendas where racism and xenophobia are rationalised by the argument that Islam and Muslims are retrogressive and must be either rejected completely or contained, domesticated and ultimately assimilated by an enlightened west. Interestingly, while earlier Orientalist representations demonised the supposed sexual licentiousness of Muslim civilisation, including the representations of Muslim men as lecherous homosexuals, contemporary popular western discourses criticise Islam for precisely the opposite problem of sexual repression.[9]

Current polemics surrounding religion and sexual diversity are embedded in fraught geo-political networks that reinforce Islamophobia and fuel racist anti-immigration policies, all the while simplistically framing the secular west as the bastion of sexual freedom, human rights and democratic cultures. A number of critical social theorists have pointed out the contradictions inherent in such triumphalist perspectives, including blindness to the complex forms of structural violence[10] in the

[8] Nadeem Mahomed and Farid Esack, "The Normal and Abnormal: On the Politics of Being Muslim and Relating of Same-Sex Sexuality," *Journal for the American Academy of Religion,* 85, No.1 (2017): 232.

[9] For detailed discussions on the varying ways which colonial and orientalist representations shaped views on Islam and sexual diversity see Joseph Massad's *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007).

[10] A foundational article that informs our understanding of violence is Johan Galtung's "Violence, peace, and peace research," *Journal of Peace Research,* 6(3), 167–191. Galtung states, "Violence is here defined as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance" (p.168). As such Galtung created a typology of different categories of violence (direct, structural and cultural). He understood structural violence to be built into a system or institution; allowing for the violence not to have an actor as we would easily witness with direct violence. The structural nature of this type of violence shows an "unequal power and consequently as unequal life chance" (p.171). Moreover, Galtung foregrounds the imperative of cultivating social relations based on the vision of 'positive peace,' which is understood as both the absence of direct physical and indirect structural violence. *For him* 'positive peace' can be understood as embodied through establishing an ethics of social justice, facilitated through "condition(s) of an egalitarian distribution of power and resource" (p.183). For a broader look at some of the literature,

forms of inequality, discrimination and injustice pervading many western contexts. More especially, such kinds of essentialist western perspectives render invisible the lives, views and realities of queer Muslims, and their complex relationships to Islam in different contexts. They also ignore those spaces where groups of Muslims might embody an Islam committed to sexual justice and inclusivity. Earlier Islamic feminist voices similarly contested imperial feminist narratives that centred the experiences of White western feminists as normative and universal, while framing Islam as singularly oppressive to women.[11] While indeed, a number of Muslim populations (and their non-Muslim contemporaries) are queerphobic, patriarchal and sexist; sorely lacking in such essentialising Islamophobic approaches are more nuanced and carefully located analyses of specific contexts, discourses and voices within both Muslim and secular contexts.

Resisting these simplistic binaries and their political imbrications, we draw on Jasbir K. Puar's (2007) work to explore varying modalities of queer identity outside of what she defines as the *Queer as Regulatory* formation.[12] In the latter, Puar notes that religion, faith or spirituality (most especially Islam) are all seen as incompatible with the liberal queer subject, emancipated as they are by secularism. Islam is depicted as a homogenous worldview, which is entirely oppressive to queer bodies. This results in an erasure of internal Muslim conversations around queerness which are, in any case, considered futile. The conventional queer subject must by definition universally transgress religious norms and is only conceived in a framework "outside of the norming constructions of religion, conflating agency and resistance."[13]

Critically interrogating this secular liberal construction that insists on irreligious queer subjectivities, reveals a specific historical trajectory emerging from experiences of the gay and lesbian liberation movement of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s primarily in the United States.[14] These

---

see: *Kathleen Maas Weigert, "Structural Violence," in Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict, Vol 3, second edition, ed. Lester Kurtz (Oxford: Elsevier, 2008): 2004-2011.*

[11] Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Transforming Feminism: Islam Women and Gender Justice," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 147-162.

[12] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 11.

[13] Puar, "*Terrorist Assemblages,"* 13. There are also parallels between regulatory queer approaches and the positions of some secular feminists who argue that there is no redeeming value in religion for women; a kind of secular fundamentalism, unable to see the complexity, tensions and nuances within religion.

[14] Puar, "*Terrorist Assemblages,"* 14-15.

groups, within their own particular contexts found that the transgression of boundaries that created public/private dichotomies, and the rejection of norms around reproduction and the nuclear family were liberating. As such, the dominant homonormative formation of queerness also called for public displays of diverse sexual orientations and identities. In some of these contexts, public displays of affection and sexuality came to be regarded as 'good' and 'acceptable' behaviour that intrinsically demanded the transgression of conservative religious and cultural norms. The particular and specific western histories and resistances of the early LGBT movement continue to shape hegemonic public queer discourses. However, for many Muslims, queer and non-queer, these norms are contrary to their worldview, specifically notions of religious comportment that includes sexual modesty. As a result this presents a direct conflict between such Muslim perspectives and the prevailing homonormative queer formulations of subjectivity.

The hegemonic secular construction of queerness is a modality in which "freedom from norms" becomes a regulatory framework for the ideal queer, premised on a liberal idea of freedom. As such, liberal freedom becomes the "barometer of choice in the valuation, and ultimately, regulation of queerness."[15] In this limited and problematic definition of queerness, individual agency is framed and recognised only when it manifests as resistance to norms, rather than complicity with them, thus equating resistance and agency.[16] One critical intervention in this dilemma is to challenge the underlying view that queerness is somehow a universal formulation. Subject to a particular socio-historical context, the queer subject needs to be recognised as negotiating what it means to be queer in a specific time and space. As a result of this critique, neo-colonial, imperial, white, male-dominated and economically mobile articulations of queerness are recognised as such and are challenged. These complex intersections of power centre the experiences of an elite group and impose their ordering and manifestations of queerness on "non-normative" bodies in constrictive and exclusionary ways.

In response, Puar calls for multi-dimensional and intersectional perspective of power and hegemony which resist homonationalist enunciations of queerness. These, she argues, silence and suppress diverse formations of queer subjectivities, epistemologies and politics. Puar's discussion in the *Queer as Regulatory* as constituting a hegemonic discourse, reveals that a particular queer archetype is rendered universal and authoritative thus setting up a false binary

[15] Puar, "Terrorist Assemblages," 22.
[16] Puar, "Terrorist Assemblages," 23.

between being queer and being Muslim. Such a binary along with its ontology and epistemology is disrupted when Muslim queer subjects 'come out.'[17] This "other" queer subject challenges the hegemonic liberal secular queer formations and demands for queerness to be recognised as heterogeneous. Important to the recognition of heterogeneity is to localise, situate and analyse specific realties and perspectives offered by diverse groups of queer subjects. Puar suggests that such contextually-sensitive approaches facilitate more inclusive conceptions of queerness that reflect on complexity, contestation, resistance, co-option, negotiation, and the self-articulation of queer subjects in their own specific social and religious milieu. It is within this framework, that we approach the study of a contemporary group of queer Muslims at The Inner Circle in Cape Town.

The Inner Circle: Locations and Intersections

Within the South African context, one is faced with a paradox where, on the one hand, the country's constitution is internationally lauded as one of the most progressive political constitutions in the world - one that explicitly recognises queer and sexual rights. There are a number of activists and non-governmental organisations in the country who do crucial work regarding the rights, needs and challenges faced by queer people. On the other hand, there are significant levels of public discrimination and homophobia in communities throughout the country which have culminated in hate crimes. The more high-profiled of these crimes include the gruesome massacre of ten men in a gay massage parlour called Sizzlers in Seapoint, Cape Town in 2003.[18] In a number of South African townships, there has been a growing violent phenomenon of 'corrective rapes' where men have been raping lesbian women in order to, purportedly, 'cure' them of their deviant sexual orientation.[19] In 2013, the UN human rights chief, Navi Pillay, casting a comparative international eye on human rights abuses, stated that South Africa has "some of the worst cases of homophobic violence."[20] The retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu, veteran anti-apartheid activist, Nobel peace laureate, and the sustained voice of moral courage in South Africa,

[17] Puar, "Terrorist Assemblages," 11.

[18] Rebecca Davis, "Straight people, why do you hate us so much?" Available online at: https://mg.co.za/article/2016-06-17-00-why-do-you-hate-us-so-much [Accessed 15 November 2017]

[19] Annie Kelly, 2009. "Raped and Killed for being lesbian: South Africa ignores 'corrective attacks'." See online at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/12/eudy-simelane-corrective-rape-south-africa [Accessed 15 November 2017]

[20] Rebecca Davis, 2013. "Why Tutu's Support for Gay Rights Matters." See online at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-07-29-analysis-why-tutus-support-for-gay-rights-matters/#.Wf64fxOCw6g [Accessed 12 November 2017]

equated the struggle against homophobia to the struggle against racism.[21]

Within this broader contested socio-political terrain, a group of queer Muslims in the Western Cape founded an organisation called The Inner Circle (TIC). TIC is a human rights-based organisation based in Cape Town, and was originally established in 1998 as the Al-Fitra Foundation before it was registered as The Inner Circle in 2006.[22] The organisation was initiated by Imam Muhsin Hendricks, South Africa's first and only openly gay imam. Hendricks grew up in an orthodox Muslim family in Cape Town, the grandson of an imam, and later trained to become an imam in a traditional Sunni madrassa system in Pakistan. Upon his return to South Africa, and after ending a difficult marriage (within which he fathered three children), Imam Muhsin 'came out' publically. He eventually became an activist and founded Al-Fitra Foundation (which was subsequently renamed The Inner Circle) to provide support and community to people struggling to reconcile their faith and sexual identity.[23]

On the one hand, *TIC* draws on the rights-based framework of the secular South African constitution to provide it with legitimacy and state protection from antagonistic elements within the Muslim community. On the other hand, Imam Hendricks and the other founders, grounded the vision of the organisation within a particular vision of Islam as reflected in the initial name of the organisation (*Al-Fitra*). Invoking this Qur'anic term, *fitra*, which generically refers to a human being's essential nature or given disposition, TIC proposes that that sexual orientation is inherent and God-given, determined by nature rather than nurture.[24] As such the TIC sees its own mandate as the creation of a Muslim community that embraces all forms of gender and sexual diversity as an expression of God's creation. At the core of TIC's mission and vision is the "spiritual transformation in the broader Muslim community" in an attempt to add a faith-based reflection to the lives of queer Muslims situated at the

[21] Times Live, "South Africa Should Reject Homophobia, says Tutu," July, 26, 2013. See online at: https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2013-07-26-south-africa-should-reject-homophobia-says-tutu/ [Accessed 15 November, 2017]

[22] Moses Tofa. 2014. The Narratives of Islam and Sexual Diversity: An Anatomy of Attitudes, Challenges, Opportunities and Trends in the South African Context (Research Report), Cape Town: The Inner Circle, (2014), ii. See online at: http://theinnercircle.org.za/assets/tic-research-report-2014.pdf [Accessed 8 October 2017]

[23] Sertan Sanderson. 2014. "I am an imam but I'm also gay. And I am prepared to die for this." See online at: https://www.thesouthafrican.com/i-am-an-imam-but-that-im-also-gay-and-im-prepared-to-die-for-this/ [Accessed 10 November 2017]

[24] Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle. "Engaging Religious Tradition." In Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims (New York: New York University Press, 2014): 25.

"intersection between Islam, sexual orientation and gender identity."[25] TIC further explicitly outlines its objectives as encouraging the mainstream and oppositional parts of the Muslim community to make a "paradigmatic shift from the orthodox belief that only heterosexuality is permissible in Islam, to an Islam which embraces sexual orientation and gender identity and counters the endemic patriarchy in orthodox Islam."[26] To achieve this goal, TIC prioritises its engagement with the Qur'an in significant ways, and foregrounds a Qur'anic hermeneutics of human dignity, liberation and justice – one that embraces sexual diversity.[27] Their educational fora includes studying liberationist readings of the authoritative Islamic source texts like the Qur'an and hadith, contemporary scholarship on sexuality and gender, as well as detailed reflections on the lives and experiences of queer Muslims in many contexts, globally and locally.

TIC organises a number of programmes, which fall into the categories of "public education, capacity building, networking, tools for transformation, advocacy, movement building, and the provision of psycho-social services."[28] Furthermore, TIC also has an egalitarian mosque space where heterosexual women and queer Muslims are encouraged to lead the prayers *(salah),* deliver the sermon, and sit where they feel comfortable. There is neither gender-segregation nor gendered restrictions in this mosque, unlike most mosques the world over. Finally, TIC is committed to trans-national Muslim solidarity and is a member of the international *Global Queer Muslim network.*[29] TIC has strengthened its broad international allyship by setting up robust organisational relations across national boundaries that allows for a range of possibilities in terms of exchange of skills, capital and resources.[30]

---

[25] Tofa, "The Narratives of Islam and Sexual Diversity," ii. This report conducted by TIC, and available on its website includes a map of TICs vision, mission and objectives.
[26] Tofa, "The Narratives of Islam and Sexual Diversity," ii.
[27] Tofa, "The Narratives of Islam and Sexual Diversity," ii.
[28] Tofa, "The Narratives of Islam and Sexual Diversity," ii.
[29] Tofa, "The Narratives of Islam and Sexual Diversity," ii.

[30] The Inner Circle, has an Annual International Retreat (AIR) which regularly draws significant numbers of international participants, queer Muslim activists and academic/activist allies. Through this forum, TIC has established strong transnational connections and solidarity with queer groups across the globe. The 2017 AIR which was held in Stellenbosch, was based on the theme of "movement building," in which TIC was foregrounded the importance of establishing a global queer Muslim movement. For more information on the 2017 retreat see http://www.mambaonline.com/2016/10/14/queer-muslims-gather-cape-town-international-conference/ [8 October 2017] For a more general understanding of AIR see here: http://theinnercircle.org.za/air.html [Accessed 8 October 2017]

In terms of its relationship to local queer organisations, TIC is situated in more complex ways within an intricate set of socio-economic dynamics framing local queer politics. Cape Town is known as the "Pink Capital of Africa" and is lauded for its liberal and progressive culture, which in specific high-profiled locations, is tolerant and even accepting of gay bodies. LGBT traveling guide, *LGBT Weekly* has mapped out 'hotspots' for queer people to travel to in Cape Town. Their list of tips includes a number of top five-star restaurants, tourist sites and clubs within the 'pink quarter' where there are many gay-owned businesses and boutique stores.[31] While this welcoming space for gay bodies exists within Cape Town, it is nonetheless a space that replicates racial, class and gender hierarchies of the broader neo-liberal city.[32] In this regard, the 'pink quarter' is a gay male dominated space, which relegates women, trans and gender non-conforming bodies, and Black people to the margins of the space.[33] Exacerbated by the racialised capitalism defining broader Cape Town, many Black, and most poor or working class bodies are located on the periphery of the city and have to travel long distances to enter the boundaries of the city centre, where the 'pink quarter' is located. While working class and Black people are certainly allowed into the space, it is not a space that was created for them or one that is inviting to them. It was created for white middle class gay men, who

[31] Adrienne Jordan, 2014. "Welcome to Cape Town: the gay capital of Africa." Available online at: http://lgbtweekly.com/2014/01/16/welcome-to-cape-town-the-gay-capital-of-africa/ [Accessed 12 November 2017]

[32] For valuable insights on queerness within Cape Town see Andrew Tucker, Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[33] Our understanding of racial politics in South Africa is informed by the contemporary political moment and the longer legacy of anti-racist activism. Within the context of this paper, our definition of the socially constructed term of 'Black' has been informed by a reading of Steve Biko's work on Black Consciousness. Drawing from the Black Consciousness Movement, Biko uses the term "Black" to refer to a more encompassing political identity, which includes those who were identified as Black, Coloured and Indian by the Apartheid regime, that is, all those who are or have been "by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society" and who struggle collectively against such forms of oppression (Biko, 1978, 48). We choose this definition since it reflects that being black is not an issue of pigmentation but rather about solidarity between historically oppressed groups in South Africa, the vast majority of whom continue to face socio-economic challenges in terms of an enduring racialised political economy. We are aware that our use of "Black" in an inclusive sense is not shared by all South Africans. Some South Africans from historically oppressed groups identify varyingly as "Indians" or "Coloured" as per apartheid designations, and there are certainly varying types of internal power dynamics of association/disassociation, inclusion/exclusion between and within the different historically oppressed groups that endure and are determined by specific local contexts.

define spaces of consumption and entertainment within the most visible and economically privileged queer spaces in Cape Town.[34]

An example of the related race and class tensions in the city is the annual Cape Town Pride March. The March which began in 1993 is dominated by this elite group of gay men. Accusations of exclusivity reflected in the planning and events of the Cape Town Pride March came to a head in 2015. A group of queer activists accused the organisers of the Pride March of being racist, and organised an array of alternative events which coincided with the "mainstream" Pride celebrations to offer more inclusive welcoming queer spaces.[35] The alternative Pride celebrations were critical of the ways in which articulations of queerness by "mainstream" Pride was so heavily dominated by the experiences of middle class, gay, white cis-men, and thus deeply alienating of queer people who did not share this culture.[36] Debates in the media highlighted an explicit criticism of the overwhelming hegemony of "whiteness" and the "consumer-corporate-capital-fuelled" nature of the Pride experience, as well as the way in which Pride events were blind to issues of disability and access in their events, and did not address critical prevailing issues of violence against queer bodies in poor and working class areas.[37] Thus there are and have been significant political contestations in Cape Town within the queer community which echo broader global debates calling for attentiveness to intersectional dynamics of power and hegemony in queer movements.

TIC occupies an ambivalent position in this contested local landscape of queer politics. On the one hand, it resists the regulatory framework of queerness as articulated by Puar; on the other hand, it is simultaneously complicit with such a regulatory neo-liberal formation. For example, TIC participates in the annual Cape Town LGTBQIA Pride March, with no evidence of critiquing or contesting the exclusivist nature of this

[34] For example, the price of the entrance fee to a club or the cost of food in restaurants in the 'pink quarter' is unaffordable for people who are not economically mobile.

[35] Luiz Debarrons. 2015. "Cape Town Pride race row grows as Alternative Pride launched." See online at: http://www.mambaonline.com/2015/02/20/cape-town-pride-race-debate-grows-alternative-pride-launched/[Accessed 12 November 2017]

[36] The frustration with racism, privilege and exclusion was captured by one of the signs at the "Alternative Pride" celebrations, which stated: "Kwanele! Enough with the privileged, white, gay, male images presented to us by Cape Town Pride in its current form. Kwanele with single-struggle politics and lack of intersectional understanding of oppressions." As quoted in Maregele, 2015. See online at: https://www.groundup.org.za/article/gay-and-lesbian-activists-call-racist-cape-town-pride-be-more-inclusive_2725/ [Accessed 12 November 2017]

[37] Nyx McLean, 2015. "Whiteness on the march: An open letter to Cape Town Pride." See online at: https://mg.co.za/article/2015-02-12-whiteness-on-the-march-an-open-letter-to-cape-town-pride [Accessed 15 November 2017]

celebration, in spite of the severe criticism raised by queer activists in 2015 and since then. Acknowledging some of the complexities of navigating the broader queer community of Cape Town, Imam Muhsin notes: "I'm not a flamboyant queen running around in my underwear in bright colours. I have a mobile mosque on wheels during Cape Town's Gay Pride, but that's as far as I ever really venture into the gay scene."[38] Such a "venturing" into the "gay scene" is accompanied by a larger apolitical queer ethic by TIC, which does not question the fundamental modalities of queerness reflected in the Pride March and its relationship to forms of domesticity, racism, nationalism and the market. Here, there is no public position or statement by TIC that asks critical questions of the Pride March and its adoption by the City of Cape Town, and what that means for the City's posturing within the global financial market and its self-marketing as a place of investment.

On the one hand a mobile mosque is a novel idea that disrupts the hegemonic cultures of whiteness and secularism, generally dominating the Pride space. On the other hand, a "mosque on wheels" becomes a superficial marker of diversity when by virtue of TIC*'s* silence on deeper ideological contentions around Cape Town Pride, it implicitly cooperates in the broader context of exclusionary elitist politics. It might reflect a form of domestication of TIC who appear uncritical of the broader politics of the Pride March which overwhelmingly functions in more regulatory modes. In terms of the alienation of Black people, working class communities, women and trans people from the Pride March, TIC*'s* silence is even more problematic since the majority of its members are people of colour from working class backgrounds. TIC*'s* location in this arena does not then contest the problematics of the whitewashing of queerness in Cape Town. Despite its claim to the broader Islamic liberation theology (which has its roots in the anti-apartheid movement) paradigm, TIC membership has remained largely "Indian" and "Coloured."[39] There appears to be a blindspot around more critical

[38] Sertan Sanderson. 2014. "I am an imam but I'm also gay. And I am prepared to die for this." See online at: https://www.thesouthafrican.com/i-am-an-imam-but-that-im-also-gay-and-im-prepared-to-die-for-this/ [Accessed 10 November 2017]

[39] Following on from our previous footnote about race, our use of the racial categories of "Coloured" and "Indian" are based on people's self-understanding. Indian has been used within the historical context of people's socio-cultural and ethnic origins among slaves or indentured labourers coming from the Indian sub-continent. Coloured has been used as a broader term for people of Indonesian slave or indigenous decent. For a more nuanced understanding, see Zimitri Erasmus' (2001) edited volume, *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identity in Cape Town.* While this racial classification is based on the apartheid system, we use it here as way of understanding people who still identity with these categories.

engagement, circumspectly and intersectionally, with issues of power and politics – particularly at the juncture of race, sexuality and class, as these are come together within the context of the Cape Town Pride March.[40] In terms of the latter TIC performs its religiousity in rather unreflective ways that serve to reinforce race and class hegemonies.

Engaging the Qur'an, Engaging the Muslim Community

When engaging with Islam for practitioners and in relationship to intra-Muslim conversations, TIC appears to have a far more reflective and deep engagement with the nature of religiosity. In expressing its religious worldview and identity, *The Inner Circle* draws centrally on the Qur'an as a primary source of guidance, authority and legitimation.TIC foregrounds progressive interpretations of the Qur'an by two contemporary Muslim scholars, Farid Esack, a South African Muslim scholar and activist, and Scott Siraj Al-Haq Kugle, a North-American Muslim queer scholar and activist. Members of the TIC embrace Esack's hermeneutical approach as articulated in *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* (1997) – a book that is considered required reading for many of the TIC programmes.[41] The text addresses interreligious solidarity against forms of oppression focusing on how Muslims have varyingly engaged with the Qur'an in relation to the South African anti-apartheid struggle. While this work makes no explicit reference to sexual diversity, Esack presents a framework for a Muslim liberation theology that is focused on resisting oppression and on bringing the lives and experiences of those who are socially marginalised to the centre of his engagement with the Qur'an. This text is used as a collective resource to nourish Queer Muslims at TIC, as they draw consciously on their own lives and experiences to engage the Qur'an. In another influential work, Esack notes the central significance of the Qur'an to Muslims in a comparative manner by stating that the Qur'an is to Muslims, what Christ is to Christians – the divine made 'flesh,' material and accessible.[42] Esack further argues that the Qur'an is alive and constantly changing, depending on the reader and his/her sensibilities. As a result of this, he states that the Qur'an has "a quasi-human personality" that is embodied and performed in a number of different ways, contingent on its audience and interpreters. [43] Moreover, a focus

[40] For an interesting analysis on the cotemporary political moment and its relationship to queer politics, see Nadia Davids and Zethu Matebeni, "Queer politics and intersectionality in South Africa," *Safundi,* 18, No. 2 (2017): 161-167.

[41] Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*. London: Oneworld Publications, (2010), 38.

[42] Farid Esack, "The Qur'an in the Lives of Muslims." In *The Qur'an: A User's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005): 13-29.

[43] Esack, "The Qur'an in the Lives of Muslims," 17.

on the Qur'an as an authoritative sacred text within the Muslim tradition is something that is shared between Queer Muslims and other segments within the "mainstream" Muslim community.[44]

Kugle's pioneering work "Homosexuality in Islam," is also considered core reading for TIC members, and he is frequently invited to speak at TIC annual retreats. His work, with its strong historical, theological and textual focus, proposes liberationist and sexually-sensitive readings of central Islamic texts and traditions. Like Esack, he foregrounds that the Qur'an is open to a variety of interpretations. These interpretations are contested, grappled with, and informed by believers' lived experiences and realities. While pointing to the fact that Muslims have produced a rich scholarly canon of interpretation *(tafsir)* of the Qur'an, he directs attention to the fact that the tradition of authoritative *tafsir* literature factually reflects contestation and pluralism.[45] Kugle invokes a history of multiple readings of the Qur'an by invoking the reported words of an authoritative early Muslim leader, Imam Ali, who is reported to have said "the Qur'an is written in straight lines between two covers. It does not speak by itself. It needs proper interpreters, and the interpreters are human beings."[46] Kugle, as a queer Muslim activist and scholar, draws on this tradition invoking a foremost and powerful figure in Muslim history, to highlight the earliest Muslim recognition that human beings 'speak' for the Qur'an, that human subjectivities and interpretive lenses are central to the production of meaning, value and ethics from the sacred text, and from the tradition more broadly. Kugle's approach does not shy away from textual ambivalence or moments of tension, but argues that such moments require critical engagement for queer Muslims in order to produce "sexually sensitive" readings of the text.[47] In addition, Kugle has also published a sociological study on the lives and experiences of contemporary queer Muslims, and their negotiations of Islam and sexuality, in five different contexts internationally. One of his empirical sites for this study was Cape Town, South Africa where he interviewed members of TIC.

In an interview with Kugle, Imam Muhsin Hendicks, as the leader and religious guide at the TIC, observes that it is through discussions of the Qur'an that queer Muslims are able to develop an Islamic spirituality that

[44] Kugle, "Engaging Religious Tradition," 30.
[45] Kugle, "Homosexuality in Islam," 39.
[46] Kugle, "Homosexuality in Islam," 39.
[47] Kugle, "Homosexuality in Islam," 39.

resonates with their queer identity.[48] Like Kugle, Imam Muhsin maintains that the Qur'an does not deal explicitly with homosexuality or homoerotic relationships. Both these thinkers argue that the Qur'anic narratives of Prophet Lot and the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah – narratives commonly understood to condemn homosexuality – are in fact *not* addressing same-sex relationships per se but a particularly injurious and criminal form of behaviour, namely male-to-male rape and assault.[49] They argue that the contemporary idea of and possibilities for egalitarian and publically recognised same-sex relations were simply not part of an earlier historical imaginary and therefore were *not* the subject of the Qur'anic critique of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Imam Muhsin suggests that because loving homosexual relationships based on mutuality are not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'anic text or the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad *(Sunnah)*, "principles must be drawn from the Qur'an to guide one's behaviour in homosexual relationships, just as principles are drawn out to apply to any host of new situations that Muslims now confront."[50] Here one finds evidence of Imam Muhsin's embrace of traditional Muslim legal methodology and tradition, which call for *ijtihad* or creative applications and innovative solutions drawing on core Islamic principles, for cases not explicitly addressed in authoritative source texts.

TIC members in light of belonging to a sexual minority, re-read and reinterpret the Qur'anic text as a collective, in ways that resist oppression and that forge ways to enhance their religious and spiritual lives. Like the example of Imam 'Ali, they explicitly acknowledge their socio-political positionality informing their readings of the Qur'an. Kugle in his sociological study, argues that Muslims at TIC "approach the Qur'an with a dual strategy of resistance and renewal."[51] While resisting previous homophobic and heterosexist interpretations, they advocate for new Qur'anic interpretations that affirm their existence as part of the diversity of God's creation. Kugle adds that these queer Muslims, by embracing *tafsir* as a discourse contingent on changing socio-historical conditions, welcome the dynamic and tentative nature of Qur'anic interpretations, which allows for a multiplicity of voice to emerge. TIC's engagement with sexually sensitive and multivalent readings of Muslim tradition has met with resistance in significant parts of the broader Muslim community in the Cape.

[48] Kugle, "Engaging Religious Tradition," 30.
[49] Kugle, "Engaging Religious Tradition," 31.
[50] Kugle, "Engaging Religious Tradition," 31.
[51] Kugle, "Homosexuality in Islam," 40.

Engagements with the Mainstream Community: The Case of the Open Mosque

The Inner Circle has been in existence at the periphery of the Muslim community, and despite some intermittent challenges to Imam Muhsin's religious authority, the mainstream Muslim community appears to have left them alone to go about their work. Such an approach towards queer Muslims essentially mimics a broader structural approach towards sexual diversity based on a "don't ask, don't tell" position. However, this societal attitude is disturbed every time there is public debate on specific issues involving Islam and sexual diversity, such as when queer Muslims made a public claim towards marriage equality during debates on the passing of Same-Sex Marriage Bill in South Africa in 2006; or debates that emerged after a closeted[52] Muslim man, Omar Mateen, killed 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida in 2016[53]; or the founding of The Open Mosque in 2014 which was initially misunderstood as the founding of a "gay mosque." This final section of the paper focuses on the last-mentioned Open Mosque saga of 2014 as a local case study to analyse one instance of the eruption of queerphobia within the Muslim community.

[52] We use the term 'closet' not as a prescriptive term. Rather, it denotes the dissonance between his sexual orientation and parts of his communal or public identity.

[53] Even though the Orlando Shooting occurred in the US, queer Muslims throughout the world responded to the shooting. Given that the killer Omar Mateen was a closeted Muslim gay man, for many in Cape Town, it exacerbated an already tense internal struggle between two parts of their identities: being a Muslim and being a queer person. A number of local queer Muslims and social justice activists in South Africa, offered their support and condolences, including: a student organization, the UCT Muslim Youth Movement based at the University of Cape Town; see: https://www.facebook.com/UCTMYM/posts/1742711982634851 [Accessed 9 November 2017]. Another progressive Muslim congregation in Cape Town, The Claremont Main Road Mosque (CMRM), committed to broader issues of social justice condemning the shooting and called out the homophobic nature of the event: http://cmrm.co.za/cmrm-condemns-orlando-killings-as-homophobic/. [Accessed 9 November 2017]. The CMRM has had an uneven history of dealing with issues of sexual diversity, including having put pressure on Imam Muhsin in the late 1990's to leave his teaching post at their Saturday madrassa classes when he first came out. It is thus noteworthy that the Imam of the mosque, Dr Rashied Omar, in his 2016 `*Id Khutbah* reflectively and unequivocally admitted that the dismissal of Imam Muhsin was an injustice perpetrated by the CMRM in the past, and that it was time to recognize and combat homophobia within the Muslim community. see here: http://cmrm.co.za/id-al-fitr-khutbah-towards-intersectional-social-justice-confronting-homophobia-in-our-communities-by-imam-dr-a-rashied-omar/ [Accessed 9 November 2017].

The open mosque was founded by South African born, UK-based academic, Dr Taj Hargey.[54] The initial public controversy around the Open Mosque was based on a confusion that this was a gay mosque partially because it was located on the same road as the TIC offices.[55] In the media there were vociferous debates on homosexuality and Islam, including some vitriolic queerphobic sentiments expressed on Muslim community radio. In September 2014, during a radio interview conducted on the Voice of the Cape (VOC) the then deputy president Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), Shaykh Riad Fataar stated that he was not willing to call the Open Mosque a "mosque". Instead it should be called a "temple" or "a place of worship" (Fataar 2014). Given the MJC's role as a leading religious authority in the Cape, this comment explicitly served to delegitimise what was perceived as a religious space welcoming of queer Muslims. Designating a gay mosque as a "temple" or as simply a more neutral non-aligned "place of worship" – and refusing to acknowledge its status as a "masjid" or "mosque" is to effectively place it outside the Muslim community. Intriguingly, this statement raises a broader question of whether the powerful position of the MJC does in fact accord the organisation the authority to decide which congregational spaces may or may not be recognised as a mosque or *masjid.* Fataar's statement reflected a power-play intended to establish a hierarchy of sacred spaces, where the normative correct, proper and legitimately Muslim space, is the heteronormative *masjid* crowning the hierarchy – and that the MJC has the power to authorise related claims.

The Open Mosque saga revealed the naturalised relationship of heteronormativity to centres of power in the Muslim community. In other words, the sacred quality of the mosque space for these religious leaders was contingent on heterosexual Muslim believers performing

[54] Hargey was seen by the TIC to be a progressive straight Muslim academic and ally who was invited to be a speaker at the TIC annual retreat in the very week that he founded the Open Mosque. However, he did not inform TIC members that he was planning to open a mosque in the same street as the TIC offices, and Imam Muhsin found out about the new mosque through social media. For this and a view of Hargey's problematic political stances, including his ambivalence on issues of sexual diversity in Islam, see Shaikh and Manjra, 2014 "Hargey, patriarchal, patronizing," see online at: https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/opinion/hargey-patriarchal-patronising-1759332. [Accessed 8 October 2017]. Later as the controversy about the Open Mosque unfolded, Hargey stated explicitly in an interview "I do not endorse homosexual living, but I do not condemn them as people." See online at: https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/open-mosque-to-launch-in-cape-town-1750826 [Accessed 8 October 2017].

[55] While Initial debates on the Open Mosque in the South African media concerned issues of sexual diversity and Islam, it later it became connected to issues of sectarianism due to Hargey's purported theological affiliation with the Qadiani sect that many traditional Sunni Muslim leaders in the Cape view as heretical.

their religiosity and sexuality within the boundaries as determined by orthodox perspectives.[56] As such:

> [T]he mosque space constitutes a temporal sacred center, not because of particular sacralised qualities or inherent axial signification […] but because Muslim congregants gather here to participate in religious meaning-making through the performance of supplicatory prayers and expressions of pious belonging and commitment [to Islamic orthopraxis].57

In this light, the perception that the Open Mosque was a gay mosque constituted a violation of meaningful boundaries for Islamic orthodoxy. For the latter, the religious and pious expressions of queer Muslims do not constitute a legitimate Muslim subjectivity with recognised access to full, authentic and Islamically credible sacred space.

In another interview, Fataar, sought to reaffirm sexual orthopraxis by reinstating the limits of supposedly correct Islamic behaviour. Here he stressed the role of the MJC as protector of the Muslim community against the purported moral corruption of gayness:

> We see and feel the anxiousness in our community. *Alhamdulillah* [All praises and gratitude are due to God], our community is trying to protect the integrity and purity of our [*din* religion]… Anything that goes against our *[din]* and which rejects the primary sources such the Qur'an and [Hadith] will be condemned by the MJC. We want to make sure that our *[din]* is protected and that the Muslim community is not fooled.[58]

The possibility of an authentic inclusion of queer sexualities in a sacred space was seen as the doorway to impurity and moral contamination, which needed to be protected against and rejected. What this overtly homophobic discourse shows is that the MJC and the "community" (as Fataar claims) experienced discomfort about the possibility of a queer-friendly Islam. The MJC's emphasis on preserving the purity of Islam is juxtaposed to gayness, which through its nature and existence, is framed as introducing impurity into the mosque. In this sense, the possibility of a

---

[56] Nina Hoel. "Sexualising the Sacred, Sacralising Sexuality: An Analysis of Public Responses to Muslim Women's Religious Leadership in the Context of a Cape Town Mosque," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2013):* 25-41.

[57] Hoel, *"Sexualising the Sacred,"* 30.

[58] As quoted in Cobus Coetzee. 2014. "'Open Mosque' to launch in Cape Town." Available online at: http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/open-mosque-to-launch-in-cape-town-1750826#.VlgKfnYrLDc [Accessed 8 October 2017].

sacred space being dominated by overt forms of queerness appears to question the very foundation of the sacrality of the mosque, its role and who constitutes its community. Within the context of human dignity, this constitutes a violation of the personhood of queer Muslims whose presence as queer bodies are cast as defiling and rendering the mosque impure – they are perceived as such an assault on the sacredness of the space, that it can no longer be considered a *masjid.*

The rejection of a queer-affirming mosque space could also indicate a wider anxiety with the increased visibility of queer Muslims in the South African public sphere. The Open Mosque saga illustrates that the possibility of a queer-friendly mosque space was so unthinkable to Muslims in South Africa, that they ignored the fact that an "open mosque" or a queer-affirming Muslim sacred space already existed, a few meters away. This might exemplify an instance of the "don't ask, don't tell" approach within the wider Muslim community towards sexual diversity, where Queer Muslims are tolerated perhaps even accepted, as long as they do not make a public claim to Islam.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to map out some of the political, sociological and theological complexities imbricated in issues of Islam, Muslims and queerness. Drawing on Jasbir K. Paur's theoretical lens of *Queer as Regulatory,* we argue that The Inner Circle presents on the one hand, a challenge to this regulatory framework by integrating Muslim and queer identities; and on the other hand, it appears complicit and compliant with the logic of the neo-liberal secular state as reflected in its participation in the exclusionary Cape Town Pride March. It would be important to track whether TIC in the future, develops a more nuanced and critical approach to questions of race and class *vis a vis* broader queer debates in Cape Town and nationally. Developing an intersectional approach would deepen TIC's capacity to address issues of sexual diversity more comprehensively within the local context. It would also enable them to facilitate a more robust engagement and application of Muslim liberation theology attentive to the complexity of the challenges within their socio-political milieu. In terms of TIC's internal religious identity we outlined their embrace of a supple interpretive approach to the Qur'an, and the broader Muslim tradition – approaches informed by liberationist lenses that foreground the lived experiences of marginalised readers of sacred texts and traditions. In the final section of this paper, we looked at the relationship between heteronormativity and Muslim centres of authority and orthopraxis in Cape Town, relationships that become most visible and explicit in times of public debate on questions of sexual diversity.

The Inner Circle presents a challenge to the hegemonic Muslim discourse presented by orthodox religious leaders in Cape Town on issues of sexual orientation. Resisting authoritarian homonormative religious narratives, TIC articulates an understanding of Islam, drawing on the readings of the Qur'an, to account for an Islamic vision that is free from discrimination based on gender and sexuality. The work and impact of The Inner Circle is crucial for many queer Muslims in South Africa and internationally – as reflected in the global reach of its programmes. It provides queer Muslims with a safe religious space – one that enables a reconciliation, alignment and integration between their queer and Muslim identities. TIC as an organisation, contributes to the contestation of religious authority within the South African Muslim community. In this regard, without necessarily or actively recognising it, TIC democratises religious authority and challenges the hegemony of heteronormative orthodox voices. The Inner Circle's intensive engagement with a broader history of Muslim contestation and debate, the ways it interrogates varying sources and forms of authority dominating Muslim tradition, and its focus on including the experiences, realities and subjectivities of Queer Muslims, present an invaluable trajectory of meaning-making within Muslim communities in the current historical moment. In all its complexity, the work of The Inner Circle represents within an African context, a new and emerging Muslim horizon for engaging questions of sexual diversity, social justice and religious belonging in the contemporary world.

Bibliography

Baderoon, Gabeba. "'I Compose Myself': Lesbian Muslim Autobiographies and the Craft of Self-Writing in South Africa." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 4 (2015):897–915.

Biko, Steve. "The Definition of Black Consciousness." In *I Write What I Like*, edited by Aelred Stubbs, 48-53, South Africa: Heinemann, 1978.

Claremont Main Road Mosque. 2016. "CMRM Condemns Orlando Killings as Homophobic." *Claremont Maid Road Mosque, 13 June 2016.* Available online at: http://cmrm.co.za/cmrm-condemns-orlando-killings-as-homophobic/ [Accessed 9 November 2017]

Cobus, Coetzee. 2014. "'Open Mosque' to launch in Cape Town." *Cape Times,* 15 September 2014. Available online at:

http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/open-mosque-to-launch-in-cape-town-1750826#.VlgKfnYrLDc [Accessed 8 October 2017].

Davids, Nadia and Matebeni, Zethu. "Queer politics and intersectionality in South Africa," *Safundi,* 18, No. 2 (2017): 161-167.

Davis, Rebecca. 2013. "Analysis: Why Tutu's support for gay rights matters." *Mail and Guardian, 29 July 2013.* Available online at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-07-29-analysis-why-tutus-support-for-gay-rights-matters/#.WgPNBBOPJmB [Accessed 12 November 2017]

Davis, Rebecca. 2016. "Straight people, why do you hate us so much?" *Mail and Guardian,* 17 June 2016. Available online at: https://mg.co.za/article/2016-06-17-00-why-do-you-hate-us-so-much [Accessed 15 November 2017]

DeBarrons, Luiz. 2015. "Cape Town race row grows as Alternative Pride launched." *Mamba Online*, 20 February 2015. Available Online at: *http://www.mambaonline.com/2015/02/20/cape-town-pride-race-debate-grows-alternative-pride-launched/ [Accessed 12 November 2017]*

Erasmus, Zimitri. "Introduction: Re-imagining coloured identities in post-Apartheid South Africa." In *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identity in Cape Tow,* edited by Zimitri Erasmus, 1-29. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001.

Esack, Farid. *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism.* Oxford: Oneword Publications, 1997.

Esack, Farid. "The Qur'an in the Lives of Muslims." In *The Qur'an: A User's Guide,* 13-29. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005.

Esack, Farid and Nadeem Mahomed. "Sexual Diversity, Islamic Jurisprudence and Sociality." *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 17, no. 2 (2011):41-57.

Galtung, Johan. Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research* 6 No. 3 (1969): 167–191

Hendricks, Ashraf. 2016. “Rebecca Davis is Helping this Cape Town Mosque Address Homophobia.” *Daily Vox,* 27 June 2016. Available online at: https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/rebecca-davis-helping-cape-town-mosque-address-homophobia/ [Accessed 9 November 2017]

Hendricks, Muhsin. “A Way Forward through Ijtihad: A Muslim Perspective on Same-Sex Marriage.” In *To Have and To Hold: The Making of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa*, edited by Melanie Judge, Anthony Manio, and Shaun de Waal, 219-227. Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009.

Hendricks, Pepe. *Hijab: Unveiling Queer Muslim Lives,* edited by Pepe Hendricks. Cape Town: The Inner Circle, 2009.

Hoel, Nina. “Sexualising the Sacred, Sacralising Sexuality: An Analysis of Public Responses to Muslim Women’s Religious Leadership in the Context of a Cape Town Mosque.” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Vol. 26, No. 2* (2013): 25-41.

Ismail, Farhana. 2014. “Struggling to find God in a shared space.” *The Mail and Guardian,* 19 September 2014. Available online at: http://mg.co.za/article/2014-09-19-the-prophets-mosque-was-a-space-shared-by-men-and-women [Accessed 8 October 2017]

The Inner Circle. 2016. “Annual International Retreat.” Available online at: http://theinnercircle.org.za/air.html [Accessed 8 October 2017]

Jordan, Adrienne. 2014. “Welcome to Cape Town: the gay capital of Africa.” *LGBT Weekly,* 16 January 2014. Available online at: http://lgbtweekly.com/2014/01/16/welcome-to-cape-town-the-gay-capital-of-africa/ [Accessed 12 November 2017]

Kelly, Annie. 2009. “Raped and Killed for being lesbian: South Africa ignores ‘corrective attacks’.” *The Guardian,* 12 March 2009. Available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/12/eudy-simelane-corrective-rape-south-africa [Accessed 15 November 2017]

Kugle, Siraj Al-Haqq, Scott. “Sexuality, Diversity, and the Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims.” In *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism,* edited by Omid Safi, 190-234. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003.

Kugle, Siraj Al-Haqq, Scott. *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2010.

Kugle, Siraj Al-Haqq, Scott. "Engaging Religious Tradition." In *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims,* 21-54. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

Massad, Joseph. *Desiring Arabs* Chicago: Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007.

McLean, Nyx. 2015. "Whiteness on the march: An open letter to Cape Town Pride." Mail and Guardian, 13 February 2015. See online at: https://mg.co.za/article/2015-02-12-whiteness-on-the-march-an-open-letter-to-cape-town-pride [Accessed 15 November 2017]

Mohamed, Nadeem and Esack, Farid. "The Normal and Abnormal: On the Politics of Being Muslim and Relating to Same-Sex Sexuality." *Journal for the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 0, No. (2016): 01-21

Mamba Writer. 2016. "Queer Muslims gather in Cape Town for international conference." *Mamba Online,* 14 October 2016. Available online at: http://www.mambaonline.com/2016/10/14/queer-muslims-gather-cape-town-international-conference/ [Accessed 8 October 2017]

Maregele, Barbara. 2015. "Gay and lesbian activists call for "racist" Cape Town Pride to be more inclusive." *Ground Up,* 2 March 2015. Available online at: https://www.groundup.org.za/article/gay-and-lesbian-activists-call-racist-cape-town-pride-be-more-inclusive_2725/ [Accessed 12 November 2017]

Omar, A. R., *Towards Intersectional Social Justice* ['Id al-Fitr sermon]. Claremont Main Road Mosque. June, 2016. Available online at: http://cmrm.co.za/id-al-fitr-khutbah-towards-intersectional-social-justice-confronting-homophobia-in-our-communities-by-imam-dr-a-rashied-omar/ [Accessed 9 November 2017]

Pather, Ra'eesa. 2014. "Sexuality, sacred spaces and Cape Town's 'Open Mosque'." *The Daily Vox,* 19 September 2014. Available

online at: http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/sexuality-sacred-spaces-and-cape-towns-open-mosque [Accessed 8 October 2017]

Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007.

Puar, Jasbir K. "Rethinking Homonationalism." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45 (2013): 336-339.

Sanderson, Sertan. 2014. "I am an imam, but I'm also gay. And I'm prepared to die for this." *The South African,* 17 July 2014. Available online at: https://www.thesouthafrican.com/i-am-an-imam-but-that-im-also-gay-and-im-prepared-to-die-for-this/ [Accessed 10 November 2017]

Seedat, Fatima. 2014. "Open (the) Mosques: How Taj Hargey alienated local Muslims." *The Daily Vox,* 19 September 2014*.* Available online at: http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/open-the-mosques-how-taj-hargey-alienated-local-muslims/?fb_action_ids=10152766170526340&fb_action_types=og.likes [Accessed 8 October 2017]

Shaikh, Sa'diyya. "Transforming Feminisms: Islam, Women, and Gender Justice." In *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism.* Edited by Omid Safi, 147-162. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003.

Shaikh, Sa'diyya and Manjra, Shuaib. 2014. "Hargey patriarchal, patronizing." *Cape Times,* 2 October 2014. Available online at: http://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/hargey-patriarchal-patronising-1759332#.VjXQU7crLDd [Accessed 8 October 2017]

Shaikh. Sa'diyya. "Islamic Law, Sufism and Gender: Rethinking the terms of the Debate." In *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, edited by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger, 94-119. London: Oneworld Publications, 2015.

Surtee, Safiyyah. 2014. "South Africa's Open Mosque: Media, Feminist Critiques and "Unopen" Mosques." *Pathoes,* 15 October 2014. Available online at: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2014/10/south-africas-open-mosque-media-feminist-critiques-and-unopen-mosques/ [Accessed 8 October 2017]

Times Live, "South Africa Should Reject Homophobia, says Tutu." *Times Live,* 26 July, 26, 2013. See online at: https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2013-07-26-south-africa-should-reject-homophobia-says-tutu/ [Accessed 15 November, 2017]

Tofa, Moses. 2014. *The Narratives of Islam and Sexual Diversity: An Anatomy of Attitudes, Challenges, Opportunities and Trends in the South African Context (Research Report).* Cape Town: The Inner Circle. See online at: http://theinnercircle.org.za/assets/tic-research-report-2014.pdf [Accessed 8 October 2017]

Tucker, Andrew. *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

University of Cape Town Muslim Youth Movement. 2016. "Orlando Shooting Statement." *UCT MYM Facebook Page,* 14 June 2016. Available online at: https://www.facebook.com/UCTMYM/posts/1742711982634851 [Accessed 9 November 2017]

Weigert, Kathleen Maas. "Structural Violence." In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict*, Vol 3, second edition. Edited by Lester Kurtz, 2004-2011. Oxford: Elsevier. 2008.

Paul, the 'Real' Man: Constructions and Representations of Masculinity in 1 Corinthians

Johnathan Jodamus [1]

Abstract

The search for theological and biblical resources that align with redemptive masculinities is a noble one. In this paper, I show how such a search has to be tempered by a nuanced and careful use of biblical interpretive tools, so that the very constructions, which we wish to destabilise as harmful, are not re-inscribed through a hasty declaration of "redemption" where none exists. The text of 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 can arguably be used for such purposes. In this text, Paul seemingly draws on a "vulnerable masculinity" by claiming not to employ a sophisticated rhetorical method of speaking, common to the cultural milieu of the time and especially characteristic of a powerful masculinity. He apparently jettisons such rhetorical power for a more embodied and vulnerable masculinity, allowing the embodied crucified Christ to serve as the ultimate display of wisdom. While this theory of "vulnerable masculinity" is certainly appealing in light of the search for redemptive masculinities, in this paper I will show that this text actually re-inscribes notions of dominant masculinities and indeed hypermasculinity.

Introduction

The conviction that "several critical aspects of dominant masculinities are…informed by religious beliefs and practices,"[2] seems to have inspired many scholars in Africa working in critical areas of gender-based violence and HIV to search for alternative theologies that embrace and support more life-giving forms of masculinities – assembled within the rubric of "redemptive masculinities." For example, in their edited collected volume of essays titled *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma assert that they wish to "underline the importance of religio-cultural resources in the emergence of liberating 'more peaceful and harmonious masculinities.'[3]

[1] Dr Johnathan Jodamus lectures in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa.< jjodamus@uwc.ac.za>

[2] Adriaan van Klinken. "Transforming Masculinities towards Gender Justice in an Era of HIV and AIDS: Plotting the Pathways, in *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain*, ed. Beverley Haddad (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011), 278.

[3] Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma, "Introduction" in *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, ed. Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publication, 2012), 1.

One such religio-cultural resource is the bible and biblical scholar, Gerald West has taken up the challenge of using the biblical text as a resource in developing the notion of redemptive masculinities through careful and close reading of biblical texts with communities of faith.[4] The search for theological and biblical resources that align with redemptive masculinities is a noble one. In this paper, I show how such a search has to be tempered by a nuanced and careful use of biblical interpretive tools, so that the very constructions, which we wish to destabilise as harmful, are not re-inscribed through a hasty declaration of "redemption" where none exists.

It has long been established that Paul is not exactly a friend of feminist scholars,[5] but recent scholars researching Paul have tried to "redeem" Paul's masculinity through various attempts,[6] while others have argued that Paul embodies possibilities for alternative constructions of masculinity.[7] The text of 1 Corinthians (especially 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5) can arguably be used for such purposes:

> **18** For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of

---

[4] Gerald West, "The Contribution of Tamar's Story to the Construction of Alternative African Masculinities," in Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible, eds. Tamar S Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 184-200; Gerald West, "The Construction of Tamar's Story to the Construction of Alternative African Masculinities," in Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion, eds. Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma (Geneva: WCC Publication, 2012), 173-191.

[5] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation. Boston: Beacon Press, (1984a); Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, (1984b); Antoinette Clark Wire, "Prophesy and Women Prophets in Corinth," In *Gospel Origins and Christian Beginnings*, eds. James E. Goehring, Charles W. Hedrick, Jack T. Sanders, and Hans Dieter Betz (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1990a), 134-50; Antoinette Clark Wire, The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction of Paul's Rhetoric. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990b.

[6] Brigitte Kahl, "No Longer Male: Masculinity Struggles Behind Galatians 3:28?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 79 (2000): 37-49; Albert Harrill, "Invective Against Paul [2 Cor 10:10], the Physiognomics of the Ancient Slave Body and the Greco-Roman Rhetoric of Manhood," in *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy* Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on his 70th Birthday, eds. Yarbro Collins and Margaret Mitchell (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 189-213; David Clines, "Paul, the Invisible Man," in *New Testament Masculinites*, eds. Stephen Moore and Janice Anderson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 181-92; Jennifer Larson, "Paul's Masculinity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004): 85-97.

[7] Joseph Marchal, "Female Masculinity in Corinth? Bodily Citations and the Drag of History," *Neotestamentica* 48, no. 1 (2014): 93-113.

> the discerning I will thwart." [20] Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21] For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. [22] For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, [23] but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24] but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. [26] Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, [29] so that no one might boast in the presence of God. [30] He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." [1] When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. [3] And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. [4] My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

In this text, Paul seemingly draws on a vulnerable masculinity by claiming not to employ a sophisticated rhetorical method of speaking, common to the cultural milieu of the time and especially characteristic of a powerful masculinity. He apparently jettisons such rhetorical power for a more embodied and vulnerable masculinity, allowing the embodied crucified Christ to serve as the ultimate display of wisdom. While this theory of vulnerable masculinity is certainly appealing in light of the search for redemptive masculinities, in this paper I will show that this text actually re-inscribes notions of dominant masculinities. By paying attention to these re-inscriptions we can avoid an appeal to, what Nadar terms, "palatable patriarchy" which is actually more harmful than redemptive.[8]

[8] Sarojini Nadar, "Who's Afraid of the Mighty Men's Conference? Palatable Patriarchy and Violence against Wo/men in South Africa," in *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, eds. Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma (Geneva: WCC Publication, 2012), 361, 363.

Methods

In this paper, with Socio Rhetorical Interpretation as an interpretive analytic combined with a gender-critical hermeneutical optic, I will trace out some of the ways masculinity is constituted and performed in the discourse of 1 Corinthians. I demonstrate that normative and normalising engendering is operative in the text and that despite the promise that the text holds out for the possibility of a more vulnerable masculinity, the discourse eventually replicates hegemonic gendered structuring and machinations from the broader social and cultural environment of that milieu. As a result, Christian bodies are scripted to perform according to the dominant cultural protocols and engendering praxes. Because Paul is structured by and functions within the larger discourses of the ancient Mediterranean sex and gender systems, one cannot comprehend the gendered rhetoric of 1 Corinthians without recourse to its interconnections with ancient gender discourses in general.

Rhetography and Rhetology as SRI analytical tools provide a very important link for identifying the performativity of such masculinities. Rhetography refers to the visual imagery or pictorial narrative and scene construction contained in rhetorical depiction.[9] This "progressive, sensory-aesthetic, and/or argumentative texture of a text (rhetology)" allows "a hearer/reader to create a graphic image or picture in the mind that implies a certain kind of truth and/or reality."[10] In a similar manner as in the case of implementing rhetography as a useful analytical category, I will demonstrate that the rhetology of the discourse in 1 Corinthians, in many places constitutes constructions and representations of masculinity in the text, and in so doing replicates a particular gendered structuring and performativity. My concern in this paper is to make visible the constructedness of masculinity, to which end I employ aspects of SRI that assist me with this problematisation without me having to be programmatic in my deployment of it. Rhetography in particular, will allow me to identify the hidden script of gendered machinations, the socio-political structure that configured bodies according to regulatory schemas, and gender normativities that pervaded the ancient Mediterranean world.

---

[9] Vernon K. Robbins, "Beginnings and Developments in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation," unpublished paper (Atlanta, GA, 2004a), 17–18; Vernon K. Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Series (Blandford Forum: UK: Deo, 2009), 6, 16.

[10] Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, xxvii.

Rhetology refers to "the logic of rhetorical reasoning."[11] It is my contention that a blending of rhetology and rhetography happens in the discourse of 1 Corinthians. Commenting on the Revelation to John, Robbins points to a "merger of rhetology and rhetography" and argues, "[w]hen picture and story become so thoroughly blended with reasoning that the reasoning evokes the pictures and the story, and the pictures and the story evoke the reasoning, then the discourse has become truly remarkable and powerful."[12] This comes about as the gendered language in 1 Corinthians creates a picture in the mind of the Corinthians. Robbins does not, however, directly indicate that rhetology and rhetography in early Christian writings, may also imply a highly gendered and complex intersectionality that blends rhetology and rhetography, and relies upon gendered discourses taken from the sex and gender systems of the ancient Mediterranean to construct its argumentation.[13]

In this paper I will argue that a large component of the argumentation in 1 Corinthians involves rhetography that would have created primarily masculine images in the minds of first century people, whether Christian or not. By doing this, the argument replicates the normative constructions and representations of gender as "truth and/or reality" in the minds of the readers. One such example of how this functions is in the ways in which wisdom and rhetorical performance operate in 1 Corinthians.

Gendered Argumentation and Engendering

It should be noted that the construction and representation of masculinity in 1 Corinthians is not limited only to the sub-section covered in this paper or the passages addressed under this sub-section.[14] In fact,

[11] Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, 16.

[12] Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, 88.

[13] Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, xxvii.

[14] For further discussion of the work done by others who have contributed to investigations that also play a role in constructing and representing masculinity see the following list. In the area of slave imagery and slavery see Ste Croix, "Early Christian Attitudes to Property and Slavery," in *Church, Society, and Politics: Papers Read at the Thirteenth Summer Meeting and the Fourteenth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 1–38; Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, The History of Sexuality Volume 2, trans. Roberts Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1985), 187–225; Dale Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 48–85, 132–37; Stephen Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 99; *God's Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 150–60; Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville, KY:

gendered argumentation and engendering, may be seen in many other texts in the discourse of 1 Corinthians. Furthermore, I do not limit my analysis to texts that only specifically mention "man" as a *topos* of inquiry, but instead, I will look more closely at the rhetorical performances of masculinity within the discourse of the texts. Pauline texts are gendered not merely in the way in which they address "men" and "women" directly, but also in the way arguments are constructed in terms of engendering. The text of 1 Cor. 4:14-21 immediately creates the image of a functioning household of the socially prominent with its παιδαγωγός under the paterfamilias. They are invited through rhetology – the argument of the text – to see Paul as the paterfamilias who has the power over them as their progenitor in the gospel.

In the discussion that follows, I will demonstrate how certain passages within 1 Corinthians script masculinity, very often constructing and representing hegemonic masculinity typical of the Graeco-Roman society. Furthermore, I will argue that the implicit gendered discourse of 1 Corinthians serves only to script bodies to mimetically perform along

---

Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 174–92; Stephen Moore and Janince Anderson, "Taking It Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees," *JBL* 117, no. 2 (1998): 262; Harrill, "Invective Against Paul," 189–213; Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions.* Minneapolis: Fortress, (2006); Larson, "Paul's Masculinity," 85–97; Joseph Marchal, *The Politics of Heaven: Women, Gender, and Empire in the Study of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Benny Liew, "Redressing Bodies at Corinth: Racial/Ethnic Politics and Religious Difference in the Context of Empre," in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 137; Jeremy Punt, "Pauline Brotherhood, Gender and Slaves: Fragile Fraternity in Galatians," *Neotestamentica* 47, no. 1 (2013): 149–69; "Identity and Human Dignity Amid Power and Liminality in 1 Corinthians," in *1 and 2 Corinthians*, ed. Yung Suk Kim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 36–42. In the area of athletic imagery see Victor Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 16–17; Ben Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 214, 215; Marilyn Skinner, "Ego Mulier: The Construction of Male Sexuality in Catullus," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 111; Bruce Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 170; Stephen Moore and Janice Anderson, "Taking It Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees," 253–54, 261, 272; Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 135–46, 165. In the area of body/bodiliness see Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 104, 16–162; Gail Corrington, "The 'Headless Women': Paul and the Language of the Body in 1 Corinthians 11: 2–16," *PRSt* 18 (1991): 223–31; Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Alistair May, *"The Body for the Lord" Sex and Identity in 1 Corinthians 5–7* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 135–43; Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, "Paul and the Rhetoric of Gender," in *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagments of Historical-Critical Discourse.*, eds Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd. Penner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005a), 287–310.

the lines of the dominant structuring of ideal masculinity. Following a "reading for gender approach"[15] informed by a cultural intertextual optic, I will focus my analysis upon the texts that I deem imperative to the performativity of masculinity. This hermeneutical approach requires a "reading between the lines," with the objective to delineate those conditions that manufacture "the hidden gendered script." In this regard, I will not limit my analysis on texts that only specifically mention man as a *topos* of inquiry, but instead, I will look more closely at the rhetorical performance of masculinity within the discourse of the texts. The former serves only to reinforce androcentric and essentialist notions of masculinity and jettisons to the periphery other more implicit structuring of masculinity that, by their concealment or implicitness, suggest how reiteration has catapulted these to a status of being taken for granted, a status of accepted or given realities. In fact, these concealed aspects operate so much more powerfully exactly because they are concealed and simply taken for granted as "natural" or, as Butler argues, "constituted."[16]

The constructions and representations of masculinity from the ancient Mediterranean was more complex and fluid and not merely limited to fixed categorisation.[17] Commenting on Pauline scholarship in general, Mitchell asserts,[18]

> that the meaning of Paul's letters *is not and never was* a fixed and immutable given awaiting discovery, nor was it transparent in the moment of their initial reading, but it was (and is) negotiated in the subsequent history of the relationship between Paul and those he addressed by his letters, who individually and together wrangle with the text and its possibilities of meaning.[19]

---

15. Susan Shapiro, "(En)gendering Jewish Philosophy," in Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 517.

16 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), ix, xii.

17 Cf. Hearon "1 and 2 Corinthians," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, eds Deryn Guest, et al. (London: SCM press, 2006), 616.

18 Margaret M. Mitchell, "The Corinthian Correspondence and the Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott, NovTSup 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 19–20.

19 Her emphasis. Also see Hearon "1 and 2 Corinthians," 606 who understands 1 and 2 Corinthians from a "location represented by the intersection of multiple identities" that gives rise to a multiplicity of meanings and gendered articulations.

In what follows I will wrestle with the possible negotiated meaning and meaning effects of Paul's texts as they construct and represent masculinity within the discourse of 1 Corinthians.

Wisdom and Rhetorical Performance as Constructions and Representations of Masculinity in 1 Corinthians

In 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5 Paul sketches a sequence of three interconnected arguments (1:18-25; 1:26-31; 2:1-5) that critique the human value system used by the Corinthian Christians under the guise of wisdom (1:20-25). Then in 2:6-16 Paul offers them the Godly alternative, true wisdom, which, by his estimation they were not mature enough to receive (3:1-4).[20] Winter sees the problem of wisdom in terms of rhetoric linked specifically to sophistry and along this trajectory sets out to explain the emphasis by Paul on the wisdom of God versus the wisdom of the world or humankind.[21] Winter surveys how Philo used the term sophist and concludes that it consistently referred to virtuoso orators.[22] According to Winter, Paul deliberately chooses an anti-sophistic approach and shields his church-planting work in Corinth in light of an environment of sophistic "conventions, perceptions and categories."[23] Furthermore, this analysis posits that the Corinthians constructed a sophistic idea of discipleship which made them vulnerable to problems of factionalism and dissension which was often associated with that movement.[24]

Marshall believes Paul's argumentation in 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5 to be in contravention of the normative rhetorical praxis of his epoch and may be seen to carry a fair measure of personal shame for Paul in light of the standard socio-cultural determinations governing rhetorical display.[25] However, neither the Winter[26] or Marshall[27] arguments consider the

---

[20] See Charles A. Wanamaker, "A Rhetoric of Power: Ideology and 1 Corinthians 1–4," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott, NovTSup 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2003b), 125. Also see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 224–25; Hearon "1 and 2 Corinthians," 608.

[21] Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, 180.

[22] Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 59–79.

[23] Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists*, 141.

[24] Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists*, 141.

[25] Peter Marshall, Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians (Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 389.

[26] Winter, Philo and Paul Among the Sophists, 141, 143.

[27] Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth*, 389.

gendered nuances implicit in the text given the dominant ancient Mediterranean gendered systems. In fact the rhetorical system that is indicted by Paul according to Winter and Marshall was a highly complex gendered system comprising gender performativity through rhetorical displays and bodily dispositions.[28] As Liew states, "[R]hetoric is about the body of the orator as much as the body of a speech."[29] When Paul is engaged in persuasion through the discourse of 1 Corinthians, gender construction and representation is exactly what is at stake because of the nature of the ancient Mediterranean gendered system and its intersection with rhetorical argumentation and gender performativity.[30] It is my contention that this performative aspect, therefore, necessitates a gender-critical reading of the text.

Paul's discourse in 2:1-5 intentionally evokes a rhetographic image of Paul's initial preaching activity in Corinth as the readers/auditors are invited to picture the nature of his preaching performance with an implicit comparison to the well-known image of sophistic orators in Corinth. Paul's self-portrayal points to an image of him preaching to the Corinthians as a very unimpressive, non-sophistic rhetorician, with a similarly unimpressive message and presentation in comparison to the sophistic rhetoricians who offered persuasive philosophy.[31] As Paul says, he did not approach them with "lofty words or wisdom" (ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας) (2:1). Instead, in his proclamation of the crucified Christ and God's testimony to them, he came in weakness (ἀσθενείᾳ), fear (φόβῳ), and trembling (τρόμῳ) (2:3). He mentions further that his preaching was devoid of the "persuasiveness of wisdom" (πειθοῖ σοφίας) as practised by the sophists. Instead, his public proclamation (κήρυγμα) was founded on "a demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως) (2:4). The reason he cites for this strategy is so that the faith of the Corinthians would be based on God's power (ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ) instead of human wisdom (ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων) (2:5).

---

[28] Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists*, 389.

[29] Liew, "Redressing Bodies at Corinth," 133.

[30] Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele "Unveiling Paul: Gendering Ethos in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," in *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse: Essays from the 2002 Heidelberg Conference*, eds Thomas H. Olbricht and Anders Eriksson, Emory Studies in Early Christianity 11 (New York & London: T & T Clark, 2005c), 219–23. Contra Wire "Prophesy and Women Prophets," 137–38 who argues from the premise that Paul is engaged in the art of rhetorical persuasion. She does not, however, see the link between gender identity and rhetorical performance. The result is that her analysis focuses particularly on women and more specifically, the Corinthian women prophets and how they prophesied.

[31] See Mark Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric: Ambiguity, Cunning, and Deception in Greece and Rome* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 95–103; Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists*, 141, 172–79.

In 2:4 Paul asks his audience to picture how he trumped the sophists not by power of his rhetorical performance, which he admits was unimpressive, but by the demonstration of the divine spirit and divine power. Undoubtedly this invited the Corinthians to visualise what they had seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears when Paul preached, namely, manifestations of the spirit such as are discussed in 1 Corinthians 12. In this instance, Paul's rhetography was intended to persuade the audience that in spite of his shortcomings as a rhetor he had given the Corinthians a demonstration more impressive and powerful than anything the sophists could have offered. Hence rhetography serves Paul's rhetological or argumentative goal in 2:1-5. What is seldom noticed is that in light of the dominant ancient Mediterranean constructions of gender, Paul's depiction of himself and his rhetoric in the way presented in 2:1-5 impinges greatly on his masculinity.

Scholars have demonstrated the importance of rhetorical performance to understanding the argumentative nature of Paul's rhetoric and his relationship with the Corinthians.[32] As mentioned earlier, however, Paul's rhetorical performance is also a performance of gender.[33] Gleason has demonstrated that rhetorical ability intersected with commonplace notions of virility and masculinity in the ancient setting.[34] Any man who had his gaze set on a leadership role in the first or second century would, therefore, have subscribed to copious and seemingly perpetual surveillance of his performance of masculinity by onlookers and rivals.[35]

In accordance with common public speaking protocol in the Graeco-Roman socio-cultural context, honour and shame were antithetical gendered binaries with honour being the domain of masculinity and

[32] Wire, "Prophesy and Women Prophets," 138; Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, "Paul and the Rhetoric of Gender," 289. For a discussion of the importance of rhetoric to Biblical Criticism in general see Pieter Botha and Johannes Vorster, "Introduction," in *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference*, eds Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 131 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 17–27.

[33] Larson, "Paul's Masculinity," 87.

[34] Maud W. Gleason, "The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century C.E," in *Before Sexuality:The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds David M Halperin, John J Winkler, and Froma I Zeitlin (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Unversity Press, 1990), 389–416; Maud. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 82–102, 404.

[35] Larson, "Paul's Masculinity," 87.

shame the domain of femininity.[36] Adherence to proper speaking conventions and the use of eloquent oratorical performance could acquire a great deal of honour (male virtue) for a speaker.[37] Whereas poor oratorical performances could result in shame (female virtue) being attributed to a speaker with the concomitant denigration by one's rivals and detractors that accompanied poor rhetorical conventions. According to Winter,[38] the sophists of Roman Corinth, in particular, were noted for their arrogance and intense rivalries. Because of the propensity for bodily surveillance and scrutiny in this ancient context with a keen gaze given to the demeanour of a public speaker, the strength of his voice, and his gestures it was incumbent upon such a person to perform appropriately.[39] Larson notes "[b]ecause performance as a speaker was also gender performance, deficiency in presentation created an opening for a speaker's rivals to denounce him as 'effeminate'."[40] The continual performance of masculinity and the concomitant threat of failure to maintain a masculine status with an ensuing denigration into a (un)masculine or feminine state of being was a very real concern for men during this epoch.[41]

In this gendered context any perception of bodily weakness, would necessarily imply social weakness and the loss of masculinity.[42] Penner and Vander Stichele argue that, "[a]t stake in speaking and acting in the public forum is nothing less than the battle for creating and maintaining one's ideal male identity, often at the expense of someone."[43] Paul's apparent lack of rhetorical skill and weakness of speech according to his own self-claim in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 must be understood in terms of a gendered cultural context that held authority, rhetorical skill, and the construction of masculinity to be almost synonymous. To attack one was to attack the others.

---

[36] Cf. Philo (*Special. Laws*. 3.169–175).

[37] See Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*. 11.2.30).

[38] Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists*, 155–159, 183.

[39] Cf. Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*. 2 12.9–11).

[40] Larson, "Paul's Masculinity," 88.

[41] Erik Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 198.

[42] Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 35.

[43]Penner and Vander Stichele, "Unveiling Paul," 8. For further discussion of the hierarchical engendering of the Graeco-Roman world in relation to public speaking protocol and in particular how this was regarded as the domain of the male in which to construct masculine identity see Johannes N. Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church." *Religion and Theology* 10, no. 1 (2003): 84-85. Here he discusses Quintilian's (*Institutio Oratoria*. 11.3.19-29) prescriptives on gesture, voice and the body of the orator as a construction of masculinity.

What are we to make of Paul's description of his own weakness and lack of rhetorical sophistication in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 given this gendered context then? Indeed, Paul's construction of himself and his speech in the way depicted in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 is very different from what the normative practices of ancient rhetoric, comportment, and masculine performance dictated. Instead of rhetorical prowess, Paul offers a divine wisdom that he regards as greater and as more important than elaborate speech. In his rhetoric in 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5, Paul abandons normative notions of masculinity as traditionally expressed, through persuasive and skilful rhetoric, and calls instead for an alternative construction of masculinity in weakness (femininity). This alternative (un)masculinity is displayed for Paul through divine power and wisdom that is made manifest through weakness in the person of Jesus the crucified saviour (1 Cor. 1:18, 23; 2:2).

According to Punt "Paul's insistence on a crucified Christ (1 Cor. 2:2), created a paradox in combining a Roman punishment executed on mainly politically [sic] subversives and a claim against the absolute power of Rome."[44] Hearon asserts that "Paul's effort to redefine wisdom in terms of the 'weakness of the cross' suggests that the Corinthians, by contrast, understand wisdom in terms of spiritual power."[45] It may well be that the social elite in the Corinthian community were responsible for this claim to wisdom as they would have the financial means to invite philosophers into their homes.[46] Punt argues further, suggesting another important aspect that will be discussed shortly, when he notes,

> In combination with the crucified Christ, Paul ascribed a central role to his resurrection, to a risen Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 15), which signalled God's intervention in current affairs towards a radical alteration of the world.[47]

I agree with Punt's initial assertion of an evident paradox in this text as well as Hearon's identification of Paul's strategy to redefine wisdom. I differ, however, in my articulation of what the meaning of the paradox and redefinition entails and suggest that gendered nuances are also evident.[48] Instead of locating the meaning of this paradox along the lines

---

[44] Jeremy Punt, "Paul's Imperium: The Push and Pull of Empire, and the Pauline Letters," in *Paper Presented for the SU and HUB Summer School on Empire Religions, Theologies, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems* (Stellenbosch, 2014), 9.

[45] Hearon, "1 and 2 Corinthians," 608.

[46] Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 73.

[47] Punt, "Paul's Imperium: The Push and Pull of Empire, and the Pauline Letters," 9.

[48] Contra Witherington *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 148 who understands the

of "analogies between Roman and divine empires" linked to the intersection of the political domain and religious formations, or the redefinition of the wisdom tradition in light of an understanding of sophistic wisdom linked with the Hellenistic Jewish tradition,[49] I would like to call our attention to the gendered paradox in this text,[50] paying particular attention to how the crucified and resurrected body of Christ constructs and represents notions of masculinity in the text.

According to the dominant gender ideologies of the Graeco-Roman world, a penetrated body was deemed a feminine body. In the example of Jesus' crucified body, in light of ancient ideologies of gender, his body represents one that was violated, pierced, penetrated by beatings and torture culminating in his death by crucifixion and rendering it effeminate. Cicero noting the indignity and absolute abomination of crucifixion states, "[t]o bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him an abomination, to kill him is almost an act of murder, to crucify him is—what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed."[51]The crucified body of Jesus was, therefore, an (un)masculine,[52] and not inviolable body.[53] Hearon asserts that "the cross is a sign of ignominy (1.22): an instrument of torture reserved for slaves, traitors, and the marginalized, representing the most humiliating form of death."[54] The cross, however, carries with it a set of complex gendered structurings, meanings and meaning effects that are in contradistinction to the dominant notions of masculinity and this emphasis has to be noticed.

Moore,[55] in his investigation of Romans 1:18-3:31 has argued that "the Pauline Jesus' spectacular act of submission [by death on the cross]—

---

main assertion of the paradox of the cross to be about God vindicating "human powerlessness" and humiliating a reliance on human power alone. Witherington *Conflict and Community*, 148 states further, "This is what Paul's counter-order wisdom of the cross is all about, and it is radical enough that, if taken seriously, it will require the Corinthians to give up many of the dominant values and presuppositions of their culture about power and wisdom".

[49] Punt, "Paul's Imperium: The Push and Pull of Empire, and the Pauline Letters," 9.

50. Cf. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 158.

[51] *Against Verres*. 2.5.64.

[52] See Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*. Oxford: Oxford Press, (2008), 70. She argues for a notion of the "'unmanned' Christ."

[53] Cf. Beverly Gaventa "Mother's Milk and Ministry in 1 Corinthians 3," in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish*, eds. Eugene H. Lovering and Jerry L. Sumney (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 112; Jennifer Glancy, "Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11:23–25)," *JBL* 123 (2004): 99–135; Conway *Behold the Man*, 67; Liew "Redressing Bodies at Corinth, 136.

[54] Hearon, "1 and 2 Corinthians," 610.

[55] Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 158.

his consummately 'feminine' performance—is simultaneously and paradoxically a demonstration of his masculinity."[56] Given the "broader cultural gender ideology" of the ancient Mediterranean,[57] which epitomised self-control as a main benchmark for masculinity, Moore pictures a transformation of a dominant cultural *topos* of masculinity.[58] He argues that "it is hard to resist reading the Pauline Jesus' submission unto death as a bravura display of self-mastery, and hence a spectacular performance of masculinity."[59] Conway in her investigation of Galatians 3:1 similarly observes that "from a gender-critical perspective, when Jesus is portrayed as one who willingly dies for the good of others, his death becomes a noble, courageous, and thereby manly act."[60] I submit that a similar understanding may be applied to 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5, where Paul "simultaneously and paradoxically,"[61] demonstrates and mimics divine hypermasculinity in his identification with Jesus.[62] In this instance Paul presents himself as weak (feminine),[63] only to claim, on the other hand, that he is actually a real man (*vir bonus*),[64] and beyond that in his

---

[56] See Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 163–64; Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, 71–78.

[57] See Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, 71.

[58] Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 159– 60. Also see Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, 82. Conway *Behold the Man*, 71–73 turns to a notion of vicarious death to undo the (un)masculinity of Jesus and redefines his death on a cross as a trait of masculinity in accordance to the broader gendered cultural logic.

[59] Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 159–60.

[60] Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, 73.

[61] Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 158.

[62] See Moore *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*, 99, 139, for the notion of hypermasculinity. Moore *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*, 139 notes that Jesus "himself is a projection of male narcissism".

[63] It was a common *topos* in the sex-gender system of the ancient Mediterranean for women to be regarded as weak. According to the sex-gender logic of that epoch women were naturally seen as weak, fearful, emotional and uncontrolled (Philo, *Questions and Answers on Exodus*. 1.8). Cf. Michael Satlow, "'They Abused Him Like a Woman': Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late Anitquity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 1 (July 1994): 2; Martin *Corinthian Body*, 33; *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 44; Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movememnt: A Social History of Its First Century.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, (1999), 361; Jorunn Økland, *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, London: T & T Clark International, (2004), 51.

[64] See Cicero (*De Oratore*, 2.43.184); Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*. 6.2.18). According to the common stereotypes regarding Roman sex and gender ideologies as gleaned from ancient prescriptive texts the *vir bonus* (good man) was the ideal essence and representation of a dominant/active/penetrative adult male citizen Jonathan Walters, "Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton

imitation of and "cruciformity" with Jesus (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:2) he is in fact a hypermasculine man.[65]

SRI as described by Robbins is helpful here to see the social and cultural intertexture implicit in the text.[66] What appears at first glance to be a subversion of the hegemonic construction and representation of masculinity is in fact a reconfiguration of normative masculinity, with Jesus being the archetypal representation of virile masculinity, or even hypermasculinity for Paul and the Corinthian community to emulate.[67] This then seems to be a Christianising of a dominant gendered script that only serves to re-inscribe normative masculinity.

Paul imbues suffering with power in his articulation of Jesus' crucified body, a body that suffered pain, torture, and effeminisation but is restored to a position of power and authority.[68] This representation of the crucified body of Jesus only serves to authenticate dominant notions of masculinity,[69] and in this way Jesus' body becomes what Butler has called a "regulatory body" or as Foucault would express it, a political technology of the self that merely re-inscribes hegemonic masculinity.[70] As a "regulatory body," Jesus' body also functions to regulate the

---

University Press, 1997), 31, 32; Marilyn B. Skinner, "Quod Multo Fit Aliter in Graecia.," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 14, 15, 24. For further discussion of this term see Gunderson "Discovering the Body in Roman Oratory," in *Parchments of Gender*, ed. Maria Wyke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 170, 171, 183, 185; Penner and Vander Stichele "Unveiling Paul," 223–24; *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), 78; and Conway *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, 16.

[65] Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 156. In Galatians 2:19 Paul argues that he was crucified with Christ and, therefore, assimilates this crucified identity to himself and in doing so constructs a "cruciformed" identity.

[66] Vernon Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, (1996), 40.

[67] A primary objective of intertextual analysis as posited by Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 40 is the delineation of various "processes of configuration and reconfiguration of phenomena in the world outside the text".

[68] See Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church," 66.

[69] See Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, 67–88 and her discussion of masculinity in relation to Galatians 3:1. She asserts, "Paul's own masculine status was integrally linked to his proclamation of Christ, especially with respect to the rhetoric of the cross and crucifixion" Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, 68.

[70] Butler, *Bodies,* (19993); Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Sherry Simon and Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 26.

formation and production of the Corinthians' bodies and to script it to perform hegemonic masculinity.[71] As Vorster argues:

> The regulatory body is a site upon which political meaning is inscribed. As such, it is a [sic] not only a product of political meaning, but also enforces and entrenches certain politicalities. It is a product of political power, but its 'regulatory force is [also] made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce, demarcate, circulate, differentiate.' There is therefore a dynamics of political power that forms, infuses and pervades the bodies it controls. The body that it structured serves again to structure bodies.[72]

Lopez[73] calls for attention to be paid to the structuring and performativity of Paul's body or using Glancy again his "corporal vernacular."[74] Lopez asserts, "While there are numerous avenues into the discussion of (re)imag(in)ing Paul, one issue that is particularly worthy of our attention is the manner in which Paul's own body is depicted in his letters."[75] She views Paul's body as a "hybridized body" that is "always negotiating (and

[71]This idea is taken from Vorster "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church," 69 in his application of Foucault *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 26 and Butler *Bodies* to his investigation of early Christian female martyr bodies. According to his analysis the female body that was often "equated with the soil" and a place only to house, grow and nurture "male generative power," is empowered to perform in a masculine way in light of normative cultural articulations of gender. See Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church," 68. This empowerment, however, serves to subordinate women (femininity) and in so doing merely replicates and supplements the primacy and agency of men (masculinity) which then only re-inscribes hegemonic masculinity as articulated and affirmed in Graeco-Roman notions of gender. Jesus as regulatory body for the Corinthian congregation and his rhetographic image of hypermasculinity also offers a competitive possibility for emperor veneration and may even be seen as eclipsing the emperor as the epitome of male authority and masculinity. This rhetographic image of Jesus by Paul may then be regarded as a possible subversion of Roman imperialism that was punishable by death. This type of conjecture, however, goes beyond the scope and limitations of this paper. For further discussion and interpretive possibilities see; Vorster "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church," 75–78; Kathy Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies.* New York: T&T Clark, (2004); Marchal, *The Politics of Heaven*, (2008); and Punt "Pauline Agency in Postcolonial Perspective: Subverter of or Agent for Empire?" in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher D Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 53–61; "Paul's Imperium: The Push and Pull of Empire, and the Pauline Letters."

[72] Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church," 69–70.

[73] Davina C. Lopez, "Visualizing Significant Otherness: Reimagining Paul(Ine Studies) through Hybrid Lenses," in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher D Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 90–91.

[74]Jennifer A Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2010), 12.

[75] Lopez, "Visualizing Significant Otherness," 90.

being negotiated by) and mimicking empire."[76] This hybridised body of Paul, as sketched by Lopez, is depicted in relation to postcolonial studies aimed at investigating notions of empire and imperialism. I am interested in investigating Paul's hybridised body, especially in relation to how it performs as constituted by power and the *habitus* of the ancient gendered setting. From this vantage point, Paul has a hybridised, gendered body or a negotiated body that constructs and represents gender in the discourse of 1 Corinthians.

Paul's assimilation of and identification with the crucified body of Christ and his message of Christ's crucified body also carries with it gendered nuances. Commenting on Galatians 2:19 Lopez notes the "stability and impenetrability" of Paul's masculinity.[77] She claims that his,

> 'manhood' is stable neither in legend nor in letter. Paul is vulnerable in a manner that he would not have been as a Roman citizen, a manly soldier and a persecutor imitating Roman hierarchical patterns, or a colonized 'other' fighting for the empire.

Paul in this regard then has a "compromised masculinity that signifies vulnerability" in his construction of masculinity given hegemonic notions of masculinity in that ancient context.[78]

Taking her analysis further, to a discussion of Galatians 4:19, Lopez argues that "Paul transforms his compromised masculinity."[79] In a somewhat comparable way, Martin's argument of hypermasculinity may also be seen then as a transformation of Paul's compromised or (un)masculine body in his depiction of himself in 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5. This comes about as Paul positions himself alongside Jesus' conquering, self-controlled and regulatory body. In so doing Paul assimilates the positive characteristics of Jesus' hypermasculine body onto and into his own body, and transforms his weak (un)masculine body into a dominant masculine image. This construction and representation of masculinity, however, serves only to buttress androcentrism and solidifies hegemonic notions of masculinity that were prevalent in the gendered systems from that context.[80]

---

[76] Lopez, "Visualizing Significant Otherness," 90.

[77] Lopez, "Visualizing Significant Otherness," 90.

[78] Lopez, "Visualizing Significant Otherness," 91.

[79] Lopez, "Visualizing Significant Otherness," 91.

[80] Conway *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, 82 argues, "[W]hile Paul may have been anti-empire, it does not follow that he was countercultural or that he subverted basic gender ideologies of his time".

The rhetorical argument or rhetology used by Paul in the discourse of 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5 is based upon and exudes noticeable signs from the secular Graeco-Roman culture of the first century. These implicit signs may be seen in the shape of normative patriarchal understandings of hegemonic masculinity. By his implementation of normative Graeco-Roman cultural practices and values, it seems, therefore, that Paul was totally enculturated within the dominant cultural surroundings in which he lived. As a result he adopted a commonplace cultural understanding of masculinity that linked rhetorical displays to gender performativity. At first glance, it seems that his presentation of himself as weak by standard cultural rhetorical assumptions detracts from his masculinity and in fact renders him (un)masculine and effeminate. At a second glance, however, it turns out to be a rhetorical move in which he manages to assimilate and subsume his deficient (un)masculinity in that of Christ's regulatory body. This in effect, turns out to be a demonstration of hypermasculinity that only re-inscribes andronormativity and patriarchy from the ruling social system. As Butler puts it, there is "no subverting of a norm without inhabiting that norm."[81] Vorster elaborates further, "There is no external vantage point from which the interconnection of discourses can be inquired. The consequence may well be that the subversion of the norm develops into a reproducing or remaking of the norm."[82]

Conclusion

From the discussion of this paper, it seems evident that the discourse of 1 Corinthians is culturally embedded within the patriarchal milieu of the dominant Graeco-Roman culture. Paul directly highlights normative masculinity as an expected and legitimate Christian gendered normativity. The rhetorical argument of 1 Corinthians is based upon and exudes noticeable signs from the "secular" Graeco-Roman culture of the first and second century. These implicit signs, made more evident through intertextual analysis, may be seen in the shape of normative patriarchal cultural values (e.g., the household code system) and commonplace cultural motifs (e.g., males/public/active/generative). Paul used these to construct notions of masculinity which were, more often than not, typical of the dominant masculine stereotypes from that ancient context.

---

[81] Judith Butler, "Afterword," in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, eds Ellen T Armour and Susan M St. Ville (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 285.

[82] Johannes N. Vorster, "Introduction: Interconnecting Discourses-Gender, Bible, Publics," *Neotestamentica* 48, no. 1 (2014):8.

The rhetorical argument used by Paul in the discourse of 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5 is based upon and reveals noticeable connections with the secular Graeco-Roman culture of the first and second centuries. These implicit connections are evident in the shape of normative patriarchal understandings of hegemonic masculinity. By his implementation of normative Graeco-Roman cultural practices and values, Paul demonstrates that he was, not surprisingly so, totally enculturated within the dominant cultural surroundings in which he lived. As a result, he adopts a commonplace cultural understanding of masculinity that linked rhetorical displays to gender performativity. At first, it comes across to the auditor of 1 Corinthians that Paul presents himself as weak by standard cultural assumptions about rhetoricians, and this detracts from his masculinity and, in fact, renders him (un)masculine and effeminate. At a second glance, however, it turns out to be a rhetorical move in which he manages to assimilate and subsume his deficient masculinity into that of Christ's, which then turns out to be a demonstration of hypermasculinity. Nevertheless, because this hypermasculinity mimics the culturally dominant regulatory body, it serves only to reiterate the very power that in the first place orchestrated its structuring, thus cementing the existing andronormative, gendered social hierarchy.[83] With regard to 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5 I have argued that Paul simultaneously and paradoxically demonstrates divine hypermasculinity through the person of Jesus. I also have maintained that Paul here constructs himself as weak (feminine), only to state, on the other hand, that he is actually a "real man."

In light of the increasing scholarship around masculinity studies and men's studies, feminist scholars have sounded a warning regarding the ways in which masculinities can be re-inscribed in palatable ways. This has become known, in the literature, as patriarchal bargaining. In this paper, I have shown that what might appear to be a redemptive masculinity or a vulnerable masculinity ends up simply not subverting masculinity, but re-inscribing it. Through rhetography and rhetology, I have shown that sometimes a seemingly redemptive text masks more powerful forms of masculinities, and indeed hypermasculinity that does more harm than good. What we end up with is a masculinity that is all-powerful, and all conquering that can even conquer death. This re-inscription of hegemonic ancient Mediterranean masculinity serves only to further buttress distorted notions of contemporary masculinity, especially in our African contexts. Chitando and others write about the insurmountable burdens placed on men in contexts rampant with HIV, unemployment, and poverty where men are required to succeed at all

[83] Cf. Butler, *Bodies*, x, xii, xviii.

costs even in contexts of death. In these contexts, the hypermasculinity of Paul simply adds to the pressure and simply re-inscribes the idea of men as providers, protectors, priests, and as people all-powerful, instead of recognising the value in men simply being human, which is exactly what the death of Christ has the capacity to envisage. It could even be argued that the death of Christ achieves this humanness. In death, he portrays the possibility to recognise frailty and humanity. In making an appeal to the resurrection, Paul implicitly appeals to a hypermasculinity that is unachievable. This unachievable virile masculinity is hardly helpful in contexts where Black men struggle with the daily ruthlessness of life where they are called on to be economic providers, to earn more, to do more and to be "the man." Paul, the "real man" hardly serves to problematise this masculine ideal. In fact, it merely concretises this ideal of masculinity and makes it even more unachievable.

Bibliography

Botha, Pieter J.J, and Johannes N. Vorster. "Introduction." In *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference*, eds Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 131, 17–27. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.

Butler, Judith. "Afterword." In *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, eds Ellen T Armour and Susan M St. Ville, 276–91. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Chitando, Ezra and Chirongoma, Sophia. "Introduction." In *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, eds Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, 1-30. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publication, 2012.

Cicero, Tullius M. "The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero," translated and edited by C.D. Yonge. Medford, MA: George Bell & Sons, 1903.

Clines, David J.A. "Paul, the Invisible Man." In *New Testament Masculinites*, eds Stephen D Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, 181–92. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.

Conway, Colleen M. *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Corrington, Gail Patterson. “The ‘Headless Women’: Paul and the Language of the Body in 1 Corinthians 11: 2–16.” *PRSt* 18 (1991): 223–31.

Ehrensperger, Kathy. *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies*. New York: T&T Clark, 2004.

Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure*. The History of Sexuality Volume 2. Translated by Roberts Hurley. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1985.

Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited by Donald F. Bouchard. Translated by Sherry Simon and Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. “Mother’s Milk and Ministry in 1 Corinthians 3.” In *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish*, Eugene H. Lovering and Jerry L. Sumney, 101–13. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Given, Mark D. *Paul’s True Rhetoric: Ambiguity, Cunning, and Deception in Greece and Rome*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001.

Glancy, Jennifer A. “Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11:23–25).” *JBL* 123 (2004): 99–135.

Glancy, Jennifer A. *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Gleason, Maud W. “The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century C.E.” In *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds David M Halperin, John J Winkler, and Froma I Zeitlin, 389–416. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Gleason, Maud W. *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Gorman, Michael J. *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Gunderson, Erik. "Discovering the Body in Roman Oratory." In *Parchments of Gender*, edited by Maria Wyke, 169–90. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Gunderson, Erik. *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Harrill, J. Albert. "Invective against Paul [2 Cor 10:10], the Physiognomics of the Ancient Slave Body and the Greco-Roman Rhetoric of Manhood." In *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on His 70th Birthday*, eds Yarbro A. Collins and M.M Mitchell, 189–213. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001.

Harrill, J. Albert. *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.

Hearon, Holly E. "1 and 2 Corinthians." In *The Queer Bible Commentary*, eds Deryn Guest, Robert E Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache. London: SCM press, 2006.

Kahl, Brigitte. "No Longer Male: Masculinity Struggles Behind Galatians 3:28?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 79 (2000): 37–49.

Larson, Jennifer. "Paul's Masculinity." *JBL* 123, no. Spring 2004 (2004): 85–97.

Liew, Tat-Siong Benny. "Redressing Bodies at Corinth: Racial/Ethnic Politics and Religious Difference in the Context of Empire." In *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, edited by Christopher D. Stanley, 127–45. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Lopez, Davina C. "Visualizing Significant Otherness: Reimagining Paul(Ine Studies) Through Hybrid Lenses." In *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, edited by Christopher D Stanley, 74–94. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Marchal, Joseph A. *The Politics of Heaven: Women, Gender, and Empire in the Study of Paul*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Marchal, Joseph A. “Female Masculinity in Corinth? Bodily Citations and the Drag of History.” *Neotestamentica* 48, no. 1 (2014): 93–113.

Marshall, Peter. *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul’s Relations with the Corinthians*. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987.

Martin, Dale B. *The Corinthian Body*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Martin, Dale B. *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Martin, Dale B. *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.

May, Alistair Scott. *‘The Body for the Lord’ Sex and Identity in 1 Corinthians 5–7*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2004.

Mitchell, Margaret M. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.

Mitchell, Margaret M. “The Corinthian Correspondence and the Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics.” In *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott. NovTSup 109, 17–53. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Moore, Stephen D. *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1996.

Moore, Stephen D. *God’s Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Moore, Stephen D, and Janice Capel Anderson. “Taking It Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees.” *JBL* 117, no. 2 (1998): 249–73.

Nadar, Sarojini. "Who's Afraid of the Mighty Men's Conference? Palatable Patriarchy and Violence against Wo/men in South Africa." In *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, eds. Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, 355-372. Geneva: WCC Publication, 2012.

Økland, Jorunn. *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series. London: T & T Clark International, 2004.

Osiek, Carolyn, and David L. Balch. *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

Penner, Todd, and Caroline. Vander Stichele. "Unveiling Paul: Gendering Ethos in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16." In *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse: Essays from the 2002 Heidelberg Conference*, eds Thomas H. Olbricht and Anders Eriksson. Emory Studies in Early Christianity 11, 214–37. New York & London: T & T Clark, 2005c.

Pfitzner, Victor C. *Paul and the Agon Motif*. Leiden: Brill, 1967.

Philo. *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*. Translated by C.D Yonge. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.

Punt, Jeremy. "Pauline Agency in Postcolonial Perspective: Subverter of, or Agent for Empire?" In *The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes*, edited by Christopher D. Stanley, 53–61. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Punt, Jeremy. "Identity and Human Dignity Amid Power and Liminality in 1 Corinthians." In *1 and 2 Corinthians*, edited by Yung Suk Kim, 31–48. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

Punt, Jeremy. "Pauline Brotherhood, Gender and Slaves: Fragile Fraternity in Galatians." *Neotestamentica* 47, no. 1 (2013): 149–69.

Punt, Jeremy. "Paul's Imperium: The Push and Pull of Empire, and the Pauline Letters." In *Paper Presented for the SU and HUB*

Summer School on Empire Religions, Theologies, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, 1–22. Stellenbosch, 2014.

Quintilian. *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian with an English Translation in Four Volumes*. H. E. Butler. London: William Heinemann, 1921.

Robbins, Vernon K. *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996.

Robbins, Vernon K. "Beginnings and Developments in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation." Unpublished paper. Atlanta, GA, 2004a.

Robbins, Vernon K. *The Invention of Christian Discourse*. Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Series. Blandford Forum: UK: Deo, 2009.

Satlow, Michael L. "'They Abused Him Like a Woman': Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 1 (July 1994): 1–25.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984.

Shapiro, Susan. "(En)gendering Jewish Philosophy." In Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, edited by Fernando F. Segovia, 516-536. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2003.

Skinner, Marilyn B. "Ego Mulier: The Construction of Male Sexuality in Catullus." In *Roman Sexualities*, edited by Judith P Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner, 129–50. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Skinner, Marilyn B. "Quod Multo Fit Aliter in Graecia.." In *Roman Sexualities*, edited by Judith P Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner, 3–28. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Ste Croix, G.E.M. De. "Early Christian Attitudes to Property and Slavery." In *Church, Society, and Politics: Papers Read at the Thirteenth Summer Meeting and the Fourteenth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, edited by Derek Baker, 1–38. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975.

Stegemann, Ekkehard, and Wolfgang Stegemann. *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Paternoster Press, 2000.

Van Klinken, Adriaan. "Transforming Masculinities towards Gender Justice in an Era of HIV and AIDS: Plotting the Pathways." In *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain,* ed. Beverley Haddad, 275-299. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011.

Vander Stichele, Caroline, and Todd. Penner. "Paul and the Rhetoric of Gender." In *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse.*, eds Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd. Penner, 287–310. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Vander Stichele, Caroline, and Todd. Penner.*Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla*. New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009.

Vorster, Johannes N. "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church." *Religion and Theology* 10, no. 1 (2003): 66–99.

Vorster, Johannes N. "Introduction: Interconnecting Discourses-Gender, Bible, Publics." *Neotestamentica* 48, no. 1 (2014): 1–31.

Walters, Jonathan. "Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought." In *Roman Sexualities*, edited by Judith P Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner, 29–46. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Wanamaker, Charles A. “A Rhetoric of Power: Ideology and 1 Corinthians 1–4.” In *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott. NovTSup 109, 115–37. Leiden: Brill, 2003b.

West, Gerald. “The Contribution of Tamar‘s Story to the Construction of Alternative African Masculinities.” In *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Tamar S Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim, 184-200. London: T&T Clark, 2010.

West, Gerald. “The Construction of Tamar‘s Story to the Construction of Alternative African Masculinities.” In *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, eds. Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, 173-191. Geneva: WCC Publication, 2012.

Winter, Bruce W. *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

Wire, Antoinette Clark. *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction of Paul’s Rhetoric*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990b.

Wire, Antoinette Clark. “Prophesy and Women Prophets in Corinth.” In *Gospel Origins and Christian Beginnings*, James E. Goehring, Charles W. Hedrick, Jack T. Sanders, and Hans Dieter Betz (eds), 134–50. Sonoma, California: Polebridge Press, 1990a.

Witherington, Ben III. *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Witherington, Ben III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

95-124 Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa *Vol. 23 No 2 (Dec. 2017)*

Gender Asymmetry and Mutual Sexual Relations in Online Legal Interpretation- Beyond the Dissonance Through the Fatwas of askimam.org.

Farhana Ismail[1] and Fatima Seedat [2]

Abstract

As part of a larger research project which examines Muslim women's sexual and reproductive health rights within the interlocutory space of online fatwas, this paper provides a glimpse into the co-construction, by muftis and petitioners, of an Islamic discourse of jurisprudence on sexuality in marriage. This paper argues that the discourse moves away from the dominant legal one of male sexual right and female responsibility to fulfil, towards an underlying and more subtle ethical discourse centred on mutuality. Combining a methodology of feminist post-structural discourse analysis with a legal interpretive framework drawn from classical legal methodologies, the paper analyses a fatwa by South African-based Deoband mufti Ebrahim Desai on his online fatwa platform askimam.org. Assessed alongside ancillary fatwas on his website, the analysis reveals how petitioners and muftis remain committed to the gender asymmetric legal (*fiqh*) rules governing Muslim marriage, yet also articulate views based on expectations of reciprocity and mutuality in sexual relations prevalent in contemporary marriage. Where some petitioners grapple with the dissonance created by their pietistic loyalty to the gender asymmetric legal tradition and ethical expectations of reciprocity and mutuality, muftis such as Desai respond by employing discernible strategies that produce a discourse of mutuality in sexual relations within modern marriage. This paper asserts that both petitioners and muftis in online fatwas like those of askimam.org, have the potential to reformulate and reconfigure present and future *fiqh* discourses on sexuality within Muslim marriage. This is evident in their alignment with an ethics of marriage and well-being, located in ideals of reciprocity and mutuality.

[1] Farhana Ismail holds an MA in Gender and Religion from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. She is a founding member of the advocacy and consulting organization Wisata, which does family mediation, pre-marital counseling, and assists with Islamic marriage contracts. She has been involved in the drafting of submissions on the South African Muslim Marriages Bill to parliament, and has written on developments in the ongoing non-recognition of Muslim marriages in South Africa.

[2] Dr. Fatima Seedat (PhD Islamic Law, McGill) holds a Senior Lectureship in Gender Studies at the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics at the University of Cape Town (UCT) where her long term project is concerned with the convergence of historical and traditional constructions of sex difference with contemporary gender norms and legal paradigms. Using the context of Muslim personal law debates in South Africa, her work includes investigating the discursive construction of the female legal subject through the framework of legal capacity, *al-ahliyya*, in Mulla Jiwan's *Nūr Al-Anwār*, a classical Hanafi jurisprudence text.

Introduction

Kecia Ali states:

> There is a mismatch between views of marriage and sexual intimacy as based in mutual consent and reciprocal desire and the entire structure of classical jurisprudential doctrines surrounding lawful sexuality.[3]

Ali's suggestion is that while Muslims subscribe to the Quranic ideal of Muslim marriage characterised by 'mutual consent and reciprocal desire', they are simultaneously faced with jurisprudentially-based gender norms which prioritise male sexual rights and stress female obedience, sexual availability and passivity.[4] In the jurisprudential framework of Islam, marriage is based on dominion, an arrangement that includes financial dependency and which denies women control over their bodies and deciding capacity on the terms of sexual intimacy. It can also constrain their negotiations for a safe and healthy sexuality.[5] Ali analyses classical legal texts and posits that because many prevailing jurisprudential doctrines surrounding lawful sexuality were enacted by jurists for audiences in vastly different historical socio-cultural contexts to those today, there is a "real dissonance between the cultural assumptions undergirding the classical edifices of jurisprudence and exegesis, and modern notions…"[6]

Traditional readings of foundational texts, the Quran and the hadith, and classical legal treatises by religious actors such as muftis are employed in formulating normative gender asymmetrical discourses around sexual health, agency, expression and intimacy, in ways that give men control over women, producing contemporary iterations of Islamic marriage and

---

[3] Kecia Ali, Sexual ethics and Islam: Feminist reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence. London: Oneworld, (2006), xxv.

[4] Ali, "Sexual Ethics and Islam," 13.

[5] Amina Wadud, *Inside the gender Jihad: women's reform in Islam*. UK: Oneworld Publications, (2006), 236-241. Wadud argues that this type of marriage construct prevalent in Muslim communities engenders a "sexual politics of domination" and creates a situation where women have limited capacity in sexual decision making, resulting in constrained negotiations for safer sex practices, thus exposing them to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy.

[6] Ali, "Sexual ethics and Islam," xxvii. Ali argues that many of these jurisprudential doctrines were enacted by jurists who lived in contexts and geographical regions where slavery and particularly slave concubinage was normative. Slavery, she argues remains conceptually linked to legal regulations surrounding marriage in Islam. Hence understandings of marriage as domination is predicated on an "analogy to slavery at a fundamental level, and the discussion of wives and concubines together strengthens the conceptual relationship." She argues that a historicizing of the rules around marriage is relevant to contemporary discussions on Muslim marriage and divorce law.

divorce law[7] that appear to seldom deviate in significant ways from classical versions.[8]

Alternative reformist attempts in the interpretation of foundational texts which offer emancipatory options,[9] have had a limited influence on the popular application of the *fiqh* of marriage. As Ali contends, "It is precisely in the arena of sexual ethics where normative Islamic texts and thought have been, and continue to be, most influential."[10] These *fiqh*-based gender norms rooted in a classical era persist, and are mediated into society by means of popular religious literature, lectures and even fatwas. They are subsequently internalised by ordinary Muslim men and women in both Muslim minority and majority contexts. South African research has shown how an internalisation of these norms establishes a

[7] By Islamic law, we refer to the combination of *usul al-fiqh* and *furu al-fiqh*, the positive laws and jurisprudence that collectively constitute the substantive aspects of Islamic legal reasoning and maxims. Importantly, Islamic law in this context is the human, fallible attempt to comprehend and concretise God's will within varying temporal socio-cultural contexts. As El Fadl asserts, *Fiqh* is the human attempt to reach the ideals of the immutable and unchangeable *Shari'a* which is "God's Will in an ideal and abstract fashion".

Refer to, El Fadl, Khaled Abou, *Speaking in God's name: Islamic law, authority and women*. UK: Oneworld Publications, (2014), 32 and; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Islamic Family Law and Social Practice: Anthropological Reflections on the Terms of the Debate," *Family, Law and Religion: Debates in the Muslim World and Europe and Their Implications for Co-operation and Dialogue,* (2009), 21-32.

[8] As examples of this see: Bennett, Linda Rae. "Zina and the enigma of sex education for Indonesian Muslim youth," *Sex Education* 7, no. 4 (2007): 371-386; Izugbara, C. Otutubikey, "Patriarchal ideology and discourses of sexuality in Nigeria." In *Understanding human sexuality seminar series*, vol. 2, (2004): 1-34; El Fadl, Khaled Abou, *Speaking in God's name: Islamic law, authority and women." 209-247 and 272-297;* Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger, *Men in Charge? : rethinking authority in Muslim legal tradition*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2015; Shaikh, Sa 'diyya, "Knowledge, women and gender in the hadīth: a feminist interpretation," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 15, no. 1 (2004): 99-108; Shaikh, Sa'diyya, Nina Hoel, and Ashraf Kagee, "Research report South African Muslim women: sexuality, marriage and reproductive choices," *Journal for Islamic studies* 31 (2011): 96-124.

[9] Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. University of Texas Press, (2002); Ayesha S. Chaudhry, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition*. UK Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2013); El Fadl, Khaled Abou, *Speaking in God's name," 94;* Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. Oxford University Press (UK), 2014; Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Hadith and Gender Justice: Understanding the Prophetic Traditions*. Cirebon: Fahmina Institute, 2007; Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An historical and theological inquiry*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Mir-Hoseini, Ziba. "Islamic Family Law and Social Practice", 21-32. Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger, *Men in Charge?;* Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Knowledge, women and gender in the hadīth: a feminist interpretation"; Laury Silvers, "In the Book We have Left out Nothing": The Ethical Problem of the Existence of Verse 4: 34 in the Qur'an." *Comparative Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2006); Wadud, *Inside the gender Jihad*, *236-239*.

[10] Ali, Sexual Ethics and Islam, xxv-xix.

pietistic loyalty to them apparent in constrained religious personhood with regard to women's sexual and reproductive agency.[11]

Using a feminist post-structural lens, the task in this paper is to explore how Muslim women, men and religious actors (in this case legal scholars called muftis) in Muslim minority contexts engage with the dissonance between contemporary expectations of marriage and sexual intimacy characterised by mutuality and reciprocity and *fiqh*-based gender asymmetrical norms. We do this through a case study analysis of online fatwas generated by a South African religious legal scholar who identifies with the Deoband Hanafi legal school of thought which originates in India, where forty per cent of South African Muslims have their roots. [12]

What is a Fatwa?

It has already been established that women's agency in terms of their knowledge of sexual rights and obligations within a Muslim marriage can be revealed through an analysis of fatwas – verdicts or judicial pronouncement given by a mufti in response to a question posed by a petitioner (mustafti).[13] Due to its moral nature it is neither binding nor enforceable and is generally not a verdict in a court of law. Its coercive influence depends on the authoritative status accorded to the mufti by the petitioner.[14] It is assumed that the fatwa-issuing mufti is pious and possesses superior religious knowledge such that his advice is aligned

[11] Hoel Kagee Shaikh, "Research report South African Muslim women: sexuality, marriage and reproductive choices," 96-124; Hoel, Nina, and Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Sex as Ibadah: Religion, Gender, and Subjectivity among South African Muslim Women, " *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 1 (2013): 69-91.

[12] Omar, A. Rashied. "Democracy and Multiple Muslim Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa* 7 (2004): 2; Kutscher, Jens, "The politics of virtual fatwa counseling in the 21st century," *Masaryk UJL & Tech.* 3 (2009): 39.

[13] See Shahid Mathee's work on historical fatwas from Timbuktu (Mathee, Mohamed Shahid. "Women's agency in Muslim marriage: 'fatwas' from Timbuktu." *Journal for Islamic studies* 31, (2011): 75-95.

[14] Mohamed Chawki, "Islam in the Digital Age: Counselling and Fatwas at the Click of a Mouse," *J. Int'l Com. L. & Tech.* 5, (2010): 166; Mozaffar Hossain, "The story of fatwa," *Interventions* 4, no. 2 (2002): 237-242; Lena Larsen, "Men are the Protectors and Maintainers of Women: Three fatwas on spousal roles and rights," in *Men in charge? : rethinking authority in Muslim legal tradition*, eds. Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 197-218; Masud, Muhammad Khalid, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers, "Muftis, fatwas, and Islamic legal interpretation," in *Islamic legal interpretation: muftis and their fatwas,* eds. Masud, Muhammad Khalid, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3-32.

with “Gods judgement”. “A fatwa therefore plays an important role in the formation of the pious Muslim self,”[15] whether as mufti or as petitioner.

The structure of a fatwa comprises of both an enquiry/petition and an answer. Scholarship on fatwas indicates that the enquiries are valuable and often used as sources of data because they provide insights into the actual problems and concerns of particular societies. In his response, the mufti must fulfil two procedural criteria pursuant to Islamic law. First, he must understand the question and, second, he must consult with scholarly authorities within the legal schools in framing his response. If a resolution is not possible, he then uses historically established methods of judgment known as *qiyās* (analogical deductions), *ijmā* (consensus), and *ijtihād.* Answers are usually not arbitrary but set on some precedent found within the collections of fatwas found in the *fiqh* literature. Different legal schools have their own compilations of *fiqh* literature.[16]

In terms of change and the evolution of legal thought, Muftis responses provide deep insights into the ongoing development of Islamic jurisprudence. Wael Hallaq argues that muftis are central to the ongoing development of legal doctrines in the different schools of law because of their contributions to the growth, continuity and change in these doctrines.[17]

As an aspect of a discursive Islamic legal tradition, fatwas therefore play an important role in providing insights into social problems and concerns. Petitioners lived realities and expectations provide “social data” and muftis respond using legal interpretive techniques and texts to relate to that data. In this way an analysis of “fatwas as expressions of the encounter between text and lived reality” sheds light on how dissonant and ambivalent perspectives and experiences of sex and intimacy are mediated by petitioners and religious actors.[18]

Cognisant of the contentions with the field of feminism, the uncertain position of religion in feminist theorizing, and the complex relationship between Islam and feminism,[19] we utilise feminist post structural theory

[15] Larsen, “Men are the Protectors and Maintainers of Women,” 201.

[16] Masud, Messick and Powers, “Muftis, fatwas, and Islamic legal interpretation," 20-26.

[17] Wael B Hallaq, "From Fatwās To Furū: Growth and Change in Islamic Substantive Law." *Islamic law and society* 1, no. 1 (1994): 65.

[18] Larsen, “Men are the Protectors and Maintainers of Women,” 198.

[19] See: Abu-Lughod, Lila, "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others," *American anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783-790; Nina Hoel, "Feminism and Religion and the Politics of Location: Situating Islamic Feminism in South Africa," *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa,* no.19 (2013): 73-89;

(FPST) because of its potential to centralise women's faith-based lived experiences, understandings and practices, its ability to make spaces for non-liberal traditions like Islam[20], and in that it allows that knowledge production and women's access to knowledge can be transformed through an understanding of lived experience as it relates to power within society.[21] Further, because fatwas exhibit a hierarchical social relation of power wherein the mufti is regarded as the interpreter of the *shariah*, and the petitioner as the follower relies on the mufti's piety, religious knowledge and sense of justice, FPST proves valuable for its potential to expose shifts and displacements in the relation of power between male and female members of society, and religious actors.[22]

Section one of the paper briefly sketches the relevance of the Internet to issues of sexual intimacy and health for Muslim couples, extrapolates on online fatwas in general and on the website askimam.org and its main religious actor Mufti Ebrahim Desai. In sections two and three of this paper, using a combination of two approaches, an analytical approach located within the traditional legal interpretive methodological lineage[23],

---

Fatima Seedat, "Islam, feminism, and Islamic feminism: Between inadequacy and inevitability," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 2 (2013): 25-45; Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Transforming feminisms: Islam, women, and gender justice," in *Progressive Muslims: On justice, gender and pluralism*, ed. Safi, Omid (UK, Oxford: One World Publications, 2003), 147-162; Sunera Thobani, "Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (review)," *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 221-224; Jasmin Zine, "Muslim women and the politics of representation," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 19, no.4 (2002): 1-22.

[20] This is relevant in light of recent critiques which warn against imposing a secular liberal framework of agency and freedom – which liberal feminism subscribes to- onto non-liberal faith traditions like Islam (see Mahmood, Saba, *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press, 2011).

[21] Amina Mama, *Beyond the masks: Race, gender and subjectivity*. Routledge, (2002); Weedon Chris, *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory.* Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, (1989).

[22] Masud Messick and Powers, "Muftis, fatwas, and Islamic legal interpretation," 20-21. The authors assert that this is not only true for historical settings and fatwas. Contemporary online fatwas exhibit a similar relation of power. As a case in point, in this research a question from a petitioner in South Africa posed to the Mufti on askimam.org states: "I would be very much grateful if you could kindly tell me the definition of fatwa and its important . insyaAllah with ur sharing i will share the knowledge to my friends.*"* (Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 18511, 2010*.* Available from:

<http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/18511>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].)

The hierarchical difference between the petitioner and the mufti produces a discourse of power in relation to ***shari'a*** knowledge as seen in the petitioner's trust and dependence on the Mufti's knowledge. The petitioner has also donned a follower status, promising to disseminate the knowledge.

[23] By paying attention to elements within classical *adab al mufti* treatises, like the basic characteristics of a mufti, the conditions and requirements for the position, the kind of interpretive relation between muftis and questioners and the basic structural elements of

and feminist post structural discourse analysis[24] we analyse two fatwas - one where the petition originates from Pakistan and is answered by South African student mufti Docrat, and the other where the petition originates from a Muslim minority context and is answered by South African master teacher[25] Mufti Ebrahim Desai himself. The former fatwa illustrates the normative legal position on male sexual right within Muslim marriage and further illustrates Mufti Ebrahim Desai's loyalty to these *fiqh* rules, while the latter illustrates how Desai conditions this normative jurisprudential position. Using ancillary fatwas on askimam.org, we examine a number of strategies used by both petitioners and the mufti to manage the dissonance between the lived realities of sexual intimacy in modern marriage, which is characterised by expectations of mutuality and reciprocity, and classical jurisprudential gender norms.

The Internet, askimam.org and Mufti Ebrahim Desai

A study of the nexus between religion and the Internet in Western contexts suggests that the Internet provides a peek into the personal realities of religious lives and practices that until now has not been possible. It is also an indicator of the current contemporary state of religion in society, illuminating "the social reality of life in a networked society", where online trends are just a reflection of the changes happening offline and not necessarily the cause. Online practices are clearly embedded in the values and systems of offline culture, providing "an interesting and important microcosm for studying trends within religious practice and meaning-making in society."[26]

Research on online chats and forums has shown that for many Muslims talking about sex and sex related pietistic concerns has become much easier with cyber Islamic environments.[27] The Internet provides

---

the fatwas, Masud, Messick and Powers, offer a substantial framework for the exploration of this specialized field of Islamic legal interpretation.

[24] An FPDA approach to data analysis requires that sources of data be taken from a range of different voices in order to showcase a plurality of perspectives. Polyphony and heteroglossia, in particular, makes spaces for multiple, silent and marginalised voices. Refer to: Judith Baxter, *Positioning gender in discourse: a feminist research methodology*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, (2003), 67-73.

[25] Ebrahim Moosa, *What is a Madrasa?* Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, (2015), 125-126.

[26] Heidi A Campbell, "Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 3-5. Studies on online interactions of Muslims attest to Campbell's thesis. Refer to footnote 27.

[27] Alia Imtoual and Shakira Hussein. "Challenging the myth of the happy celibate: Muslim women negotiating contemporary relationships," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 1 (2009): 25-39; Roxanne D. Marcotte, "Gender and sexuality online on Australian Muslim forums." *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 1 (2010): 117-138; Anna Piela, "Muslim women's

anonymity, allows for the freedom for Muslim men and women to articulate intimate sexual issues and seek counselling and religious legal advice through easy access to online muftis, also known as juris-consults who constitute part of a wide group of ulama / religious scholars.[28] The Internet has also generated increased individualization and privatization of religion and new usages in activism and decision-making, but it has also entrenched conformity and compliance with religious authorities and dominant doctrines.[29]

Recent research confirms that online fatwas in particular have the potential to destabilise normative forms of religious authority, establish a "new manifestation of a Muslim ummah*"* (religious community) and inform and influence the legislative processes of incorporating aspects of Islamic law into the secular legal system for Muslims in minority contexts[30], as well as contribute towards reforming trends in women's sexual health [31]. Online fatwas can therefore provide insights into ulama*'s* "new *ijtihād*" (independent reasoning) [32] perspectives on contemporary lived realities of ordinary Muslims.

The very act of asking someone for a fatwa is the most explicit recognition of that person's religious authority. Ebrahim Desai exemplifies a scholar who, although being trained in non- Azhari institution outside of the Arab world, gained global recognition mainly through mass support accumulated via information and communication technology.[33]

---

online discussions of gender relations in Islam." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 3 (2010): 425-435.

[28] Gary R Bunt, *Islam in the digital age: E-jihad, online fatwas and cyber Islamic environments*. Pluto Press, (2003); Mohamed Chawki, "Islam in the Digital Age: Counselling and Fatwas at the Click of a Mouse," *J. Int'l Com. L. & Tech.* 5 (2010): 165; Larsen, "Men are the Protectors and Maintainers of Women," 200-205.

[29] Bunt, "Islam in the digital age", 2-6; Heidi A. Campbell, "Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society," 64-93; Jens Kutscher, "The politics of virtual fatwa counseling in the 21st century," *Masaryk UJL & Tech.* 3 (2009): 33; Vit Sisler, "Cyber counsellors: online Fatwas, arbitration tribunals and the construction of muslim identity in the UK," *Information, Communication & Society* 14, no. 8 (2011): 1136-1159.

[30] Vit Sisler, "European Courts' Authority Contested: The Case of Marriage and Divorce Fatwas On-Line," *Masaryk UJL & Tech.* 3 (2009): 51; Sisler, "Cyber counsellors," 1152-3.

[31] Alexis Kort, "Dar al-Cyber Islam: Women, domestic violence, and the Islamic reformation on the World Wide Web," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2005): 363-383.

[32] Kort, "Dar al-Cyber Islam," 363.

[33] Sisler, "European Courts' Authority Contested," 67.

Desai is identified as the author and acknowledged religious authority figure of askimam.org, where every fatwa on the site is approved and sanctioned by him. [34] He trained at two Deoband seminaries in India and is currently based in Sherwood, Durban, at *Darul-ifta al Mahmudiyyah,* a training institute for muftis, where he teaches and from where all his fatwas are generated. The Deoband hanafi legal school in which Desai is located, is also shared by many established religious authority figures and structures in South Africa so that his fatwas provide insights into the religious thought and trends within the South African Deoband structures. Desai is arguably "master teacher", and a survey of the structure of the fatwas on askimam.org reveal that while Desai's students hail from different geographical locations, they generate the bulk of fatwas. As master teacher he is the final authority as indicated by the closing line at the end of each fatwa: "checked and approved by Mufti Ebrahim Desai".[35]

Moosa[36] argues that in the madressa tradition, "master teachers" and their texts are valued and integral to the scholarly formation of apprentice students.[37] In this regard, Desai is affiliated with a host of linked teaching institutions, websites and publications which provide an online religious space and publications for ordinary Muslims and other scholars.[38] Desai also occupies prominent positions within various high profile *iftā* (fatwa-

[34] About Us, askimam.org, [Online] Available at: http://askimam.org/about. [Accessed on 23 November 2015].

[35] In the foreword of his online publication Contemporary Fatawa volume 2, which is a compilation of selected online fatwas and accessible as a free download on the daruliftaa site, Desai says, "…most of the fatwas [herein] were answered by the students of the Darul Iftaa as part of their training in becoming Muftis" (see Desai, Ebrahim. *Contemporary Fatawa Volume 2.* Daruliftaa Mahmudiyyah [online] n.d. Available from: <http://www.daruliftaa.net/index.php/resources/publications/viewcategory/27-publications >. [Accessed 30 October 2015].

[36] Ebrahim Moosa, *What is a Madrasa*? Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, (2015), 125-126.

In this book Ebrahim Moosa traces the pedagogical roots and practices of the Deoband seminaries in India.

[37] Moosa describes three characteristics of the ideal "master teacher" as, first, being an example of acting on his knowledge, second, training students in the way Prophet guided his companions and, third, assisting a student to "imitate and internalize the exemplary conduct of the master- teacher".

[38] The websites are listed as idealwoman.org, daruliftaa.net, and darulmahmood.org. Another affiliated website in which his fatwas, advice and talks are found is the UK-based Darulfiqh.com. Herein Desai's additional credentials and involvement in various iftaa bodies are listed. Desai is also the author of "Contemporary Fatawa" vol 1 and 2 and numerous other publications on these sites.

making) bodies, indicating his potential influence on ulama structures in South Africa[39]

His website, askimam.org, is a well-organised, easily researchable site, which, like those in Muslim majority contexts, contains a range of fatwa, reflecting varying themes dealing with religiosity, piety and health. Answers on the website reflect the religious outlook of the Deoband Hanafi school of thought, are concise, and do not always provide substantial textual analysis and justifications.[40] The distinct feature is that answers generated on the website diverge from the ones in Muslim majority contexts, instead reflecting the contemporary challenges of Muslim minority contexts.[41] This is salient since scholars have noted that some fatwa sites in Muslim minority contexts are more open and pragmatic in dealing with contemporary challenges and others are more conservative and limited.[42] Studies on Desai's online fatwas make arguments for both conservative[43] as well as reforming[44] trends, the latter particularly on the issue of domestic violence.

In summation, we identify Desai and his website askimam.org as important features of the discursive Islamic landscape providing insights

---

[39] DarulFiqh. 2012. Profile of Mufti Ebrahim Desai. Available from: < http://darulfiqh.com/profile-of-mufti-ebrahim-desai-daamat-barakatuhum/> [Accessed 29 November 2015].

The darulfiqh website describes these positions as: "Executive member of KZN Jamiatul Ulamā (The Council Of Muslim Theologians), Secretary of Jamiatul Mufteen (The Council of Muftis) – This is an organisation comprising of the senior Muftis of South Africa from 12 Darul Iftaa's, Head of the Fatwa Department of KZN Jamiatul Ulamā (The Council Of Muslim Theologians), Head of the Judicial Committee of KZN Jamiatul Ulamā (The Council Of Muslim Theologians), Official Arbitrator of commercial and marital mediations/arbitrations".

[40] Sisler, "European Courts' Authority Contested," 65-66.

[41] Bunt, "Islam in the digital age," 167-168; Kort, "Dar al-Cyber Islam: Women, domestic violence," 363-383.

[42] Chawki, "Islam in the digital age: counselling," 165-180; Kutscher, "The politics of virtual fatwa counseling," 33.

[43] Kutscher, "The politics of virtual fatwa counseling," 39. In an analytical comparison of fatwas dealing with Muslim perspectives of non-Muslims in a minority context, Kutscher describes askimam.org as "conservative" and "supporting counter-societal developments" probably due to the "mufti's ideological geographical and educational environment". He contends the apartheid system of "non-integration" may have somewhat contributed to the Desai's conservative and mono-doctrinal orientation.

[44] Kort, "Dar al-Cyber Islam: Women, domestic violence," 378-380. Kort's study on domestic abuse was the only one I located which focused on sexual health within the fatwas of mufti Ebrahim Desai on askimam.org, exposing a substantial gap in the research on how South African-based online fatwas are "telling stories" (Mathee M, "Womens agency in Muslim marriage," 26) on women's sexual health and to what extent contemporary experiences and social realities influence these fatwas.

into the changing relationship between legal argument and interpretation and people's social realities as portrayed in the fatwas. The anonymity provided by the online space allows for the generation of fatwas on a range of issues including sexual reproductive concerns. Recent research on askimam.org argues for both conservative and reforming trends on the website. Our analysis below shows further how these trends form part of the ongoing work of law in society, namely the alignment of classical *fiqh* or historical legal norms with contemporary social norms and expectations to produce modern ways of living.[45]

"If a Husband Ask to his Wife for Sex, and if she Refused Oftenly"

Fatwa C[46] published on October 2009 is answered by one of Desai's students, Rayhaan Docrat, and reads as follows:

> *Question: if a husband ask to his wife for sex, and if she refused oftenly with reasons that she is not in mood, and after this, if husband indulge in some other immoral and sinful activities, then what would be position of both in front of ALLAH?*
>
> *Answer: When a husband and wife make nikaah Allah Ta'ala grants certain rights and privileges to one over the other. It is the duty of the man to provide shelter for the woman and to take care of her needs. Similarly, it is necessary for the woman to obey her husband at all times and to respect his authority over her.*
>
> *Rasulullah has mentioned*
>
> *"If I had to command anyone to make Sajdah (prostrate) to another person, I would of instructed the woman to make Sajdah to her husband"*
>
> *Rasulullah also mentioned*
>
> *When a man calls his wife to bed and she refuses, he then spends the night upset and angry with her, the angels curse her till the morning."*

[45] Legal change is not novel to the online space. The commentary tradition in Islamic law is a historical form of legal writing which also illustrates a traditional form of legal change. For more detail see Mulla Jiwan's *Nūr al-Anwār* where his commentary on child custody actually changes the legal outcome for children of divorce. Jiwan, Mulla Ahmad ibn Abi Sa'id ibn 'Ubayd Allah al-Hanafi al-Sadiqi *Nur Al-Anwar Ma'a Hashiyat Qamar Al Aqmar.*Delhi: Kutub'khanah Rashidiyah, (1960), 286.

[46] Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 18350, 2009. Available from: < http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/18350>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

> *If a woman has a valid reason for not responding positively to her husband, she should discuss this with him.*
>
> *If there is no valid reason for not responding to him, she should rather obey him and save herself from the curses of the angels. However, if she does not offer herself to her husband, it does not give him the right to abuse his chastity and to involve himself in any illicit relations. If he commits any evil or immoral act, he will be responsible for his own actions and answerable for it on the day of Qiyaamah….*
>
> *And Allah knows best*
>
> *Wassalaamu `alaykum*
>
> *Ml. Rayhaan Docrat,*
>
> *Student Darul Iftaa*
>
> *Checked and Approved by:*
>
> *Mufti Ebrahim Desai*
>
> *Darul Iftaa, Madrassah In'aamiyyah*

A brief analysis of the dynamic of male sexual need and female responsibility tells us how the jurist views a wife's refusal. But first, the petition tells us how the male petitioner problematises his wife's refusal. He makes a link between her refusal and his "immoral and sinful activities", and extends the consequences of her refusal to their "position in front of Allah". His question draws a direct link from her sexual refusal to their relationship with God. The mufti's response affirms this; the cursing angels are invoked "when he then spends the night upset and angry with her" to show a direct threat to the wife's God-believer relationship arising out of her sexual refusal. That threat becomes a coercive tool to prompt her into having sex.

This is further seen in an analysis of the petition in the other main fatwa under discussion in this paper, fatwa A[47]which originates from the UK, is answered by Desai himself and found in the website's category of marriage, dated Feb 2007. The male petitioner asks:

> My wife got very law sexual desire. I want to have intimacy every other day or after week, she doesn't let me even touch her. I fill very bad and then I don't know what to do. Is there any sin when wife reject her husband? Can you please explain to me about this situation?

[47] Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 17537, 2009. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/17537>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

Here too the petition reveals a slippage in the dominant discourse of male sexual needs as a right towards one of female sexual assertiveness in the form of the wife's decision to refuse. She is constructed by the petitioner as both a powerful subject with agency in the sexual arena and as a powerless subject of the legal discourse, which portrays her as sinful if she does not fulfil her husband's rights by being sexually available. He seeks the mufti assistance to coerce his wife through juristic means to have sex with him, appealing to her pietistic commitment.

Confirming established research in this field,[48] further analysis of other petitions on askimam.org reveals that female petitioners evoke an internalised ethical Islamic voice over a legal one and simultaneously also display a pietistic commitment to the normative Islamic legal tradition as illustrated in the following excerpt from fatwa F in the sample.[49] Here the female petitioner who was sexually molested as a child feels forced into consummating her arranged marriage and resorts to the Mufti to argue for an annulment. She says:

> …My 'husband' knew about my traumatic childhood experience but forced kissed me and touched when I was sleeping…… I felt violated and hurt. I really do not like him, and I feel like I can't full fill my duty as a wife towards him. How can I love someone when I was forced into this …….“I know I won't be able to full fill my duty as his wife, it's not fair to me nor to him”….

The analysis reveals a slippage as the wife simultaneously accepts, and resists, the dominant discourse of male need and female responsibility in favour of a subordinate discourse of an ethics of fairness in this context. This synchronic movement puts her in a subjective position of power in relation to the discourse of male sexual need.

The analysis also supported evidence in the literature that the internalised perspectives of male sexual need presented here in familiar hadith, is not acceptable by some women. This is evidenced too by the

---

[48] Ahmed, Leila, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. Yale University Press, (1992), 66. Ahmed theorised that Muslim women have internalized two Islamic voices and “two competing understandings of gender”: the pragmatic legal voice, in which marriage is deemed an institution of sexual hierarchy, and the ethical voice which is “virtually unheard by rulers and lawmakers” and which “stressed the importance of the spiritual and ethical dimensions of being and the equality of all individuals”.

[49] Askimam.org.2011.Fatwa#32362,2015.Availablefrom: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/32362>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

agentival roles played by both wives in fatwas A and C who refused to engage in intercourse because (as in the case of fatwa C) "she was not in the mood," and in fatwa A, "she doesn't even let me touch her." Fatwa F further illustrates that this internalised perspective is sometimes also offset by a discourse of fairness. Determined by life experiences and their internalisation of a pragmatic legal Islamic voice and an ethical voice,[50] some women evoke the ethical voice by negotiating, resisting or rejecting the discourse of female responsibility to fulfil male sexual need and instead enact their capacity to refuse.

In addition to revealing how wives in fatwas A and C resist the *fiqh*-based gender norms, an analysis of other ancillary petitions on Desai's website provide further glimpses into how Muslim wives are making choices in the sexual realm of marriage. Some women balance pietistic concerns with sexual desire, while others also resist the Deoband gender ideology,[51] thereby informing Desai and the other jurists of women's contemporary experiences, expectations and understandings of marriage as relations of mutuality and reciprocity.

As an example of the former, the petition in fatwa S[52], reads:

> During haiz if wife insist to have sex using condom when there is very little or almost no bleeding during the three days wait period of haiz.
>
> Is it permissible in Islam or not? There is no forcing or desire shown from husband for sex. It is only wife expectation.

As examples of the latter, the petition in fatwa P reads[53]:

---

[50] Drawing on Ahmed's thesis, I argue that the petitioner's argument in fatwa F can be understood in two ways. Firstly, she could be arguing that what is not fair to her is to be in a situation where she cannot fulfil her duty, and given her admitted failure to meet this duty on the basis of her diminished emotional and psychological capacity, she should also be released from the marriage. Secondly, she could be arguing that what's fair to her is her right to refuse consummation and force, and to not want the marriage. Viewed both ways, she appeals to the ethical voice as described.

[51] This ideology is characterised by male domination and priority and female subordination and submissiveness to men, collectively considered as a divinely sanctioned social order. See: Ambreen Agha, "Religious Discourse in Tablighi Jama'at: A Challenge to Female Sexuality?" *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 2, no. 3 (2015), 1-16; Metcalf, Barbara Daly, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's Bihishti Zewar* (trans). Berkeley: University of California Press, (1990), 37.

[52] Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 31509, 2014. Available from:

< http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/31509>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

See also fatwa # 28092, (hereon referred to as fatwa R) in this regard.

[53] Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 28553, 2014. Available from:

<http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/28553>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

> "Have women only been created to satisfy their husbands? Is that the only reason to be a wife? So women don't have any value?

Similarly the petition in fatwa Q reads[54]:

> How can something that has been created for something else be equal to it? I've always heard that men and women are equal in Islam depending on their actions, but I find it hard to swallow that the very nature of women is to be subservient to men?

Returning to fatwa C, it is evident that when dealing with male petitioners' sexual needs, some jurists, like Docrat, respond by using hadith sources to establish male sexual dominance and female obedience, and explain the dire consequences women invite if they refuse sex. In his narrative, male sexual need and access to wives is prioritised to such an extent that female sexual availability is a central legal aspect to a Muslim marriage such that a wife's non-availability renders her in violation of the legal parameters of the marriage contract.

Fatwa C demonstrates that male sexual need and its link to divine approval, is a prominent societal and institutional discourse, and in accordance with the literature, is internalised by ordinary Muslim men and women, and muftis too. It is entrenched within the legal logic governing a Muslim marriage to the extent that, even in the face of women's pietistic concerns and instances of weakened physical health, it is prioritised.[55]

"Intimate Relation is a Mutual Issue between the Spouses"

The legal logic governing marriage in the above fatwas is largely in line with traditional Deoband gender ideology which is characteristically

---

[54] Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 14847, 2007. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/14847>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

55 In addition to fatwa F, we also refer to another fatwa G where a a newly-wed female petitioner asks whether she can avoid washing her hair during the ritual purification required after sex, because the frequent sexual intercourse and subsequent ritual washing has created sinus problems and headaches for her. Citing a Hanafi textual source, the student mufti grants her a concession but still prioritises male sexual need in the face of her pietistic and biomedical concerns. (Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 15104, 2007. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/15104>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].)

These fatwas are fringe examples which provide further insights into the entrenched idea that male sexual need is a priority and female availability is a responsibility, even in the face of women's pietistic concerns and instances of weakened physical health, thus further according with the literature and confirming that this a dominant discourse within the Muslim mind.

hierarchical. Below, a close reading of the response to the question in fatwa A reveals more than simple support for this legal logic. As noted above in fatwa C, Mufti Desai approves and sanctions Docrat's response suggesting he also subscribes to the legal logic in the fatwa. However in Desai's response to fatwa A which has a similar petition on a woman's sexual agency, and which he answers himself, it appears that Desai also conditions this gender ideology.[56]

In Fatwa A (the petition of which has already been presented above) Desai's response reads:

> Intimate relation is a mutual issue between the spouses. Apart from the wife fulfilling her marital obligations, it is important that the husband takes the feelings, tempo etc. of the wife into consideration before becoming upset. By the husband forcing the issue upon the wife, sometimes it could create estrangement in the marriage. Instead of the husband worrying about the sin of refusing him his marital right, rather talk to her and enquire if she experiences any difficulty in doing so. By the husband forcing the issue upon the wife, she will eventually feel used for this purpose and become demoralized which could possibly ruin the marriage and complicate matters further.

His response to a petition from a Muslim minority context, the United Kingdom, might not seem remarkable until it is compared to student mufti Docrat's response in fatwa C.[57]

Mufti Desai's answer does not wholly emphasise the *fiqh*-based gender norms. His answer is instead characterised by a shift away from the discourse of female sexual availability and male sexual right and wifely sin, toward mutuality even as he still remains loyal to the legal tradition. To theorise this shift with his concurrent loyalty, we offer an analysis that points to Desai's use of at least five strategies to guide the petitioner toward a discourse of mutuality. In so doing we argue that mufti's such as Desai, remain loyal to *fiqh*-based notions of male-female sexuality while simultaneously also conditioning the legal logic of dominion with an ethics of reciprocity and mutuality.

First, Desai's answer displays his awareness of the minority Muslim context (in this case both his context of South Africa as well as the petitioners context, the UK) where modern marriage is under social and political pressure to function on ideas of mutuality, and where petitions represent female agency and choice within the sexual realm of marriage.

---

[56] For a description of the Deoband gender ideology, see footnote 51.

[57] Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 18350, 2009. Available from:

< http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/18350>. [Accessed 15 October 2015]

Second, Desai's response is necessarily conditioned by his awareness that the classical law from which he sources his opinion, subscribes to an imperative to preserve, rather than dissolve, an existing marriage. Third, Desai finds value in spouses communicating sexual concerns with each other and, fourth, he advocates what may be described as a benevolent masculinity. In the midst of these, Desai also brings attention to the issue of forced intercourse, an option which he does not outright negate, but discourages reflecting the Hanafi view that while it may be licit, it is nevertheless unethical.[58]

Of these five strategies, we provide a glimpse into three, i.e. the second, third and fourth, of the five strategies used by Desai namely: the marriage imperative, effective sexual communication, and a benevolent masculinity. We show first that by relying on two discourses, that of mutuality and emotional and psychological well-being, muftis like Desai are able to negotiate between the jurisprudential logic of marriage and the ethical consideration, and they remain committed to the former, while also strongly inclining toward the latter.

Desai's Strategies

1-The Marriage Imperative

In addition to the first strategy where Desai might be considerate of minority Muslim contexts where modern marriage is under social and political pressure to function on ideas of mutuality and reciprocity, where petitions illustrate female agency and choice within the sexual realm of marriage, his second strategy is to maintain the imperative to preserve rather than dissolve an existing marriage. For example, Desai stresses the marriage imperative through his attempts to relieve the petitioner's wife from coercion. He asks the husband not to "force the issue upon the wife," in case it creates "estrangement in the marriage." A few sentences later, he once again expresses concerns over the wife's emotions of being forced into sex and the resulting negative morale which, he says, could "ruin the marriage and complicate matters further."

Traditional Muslim thought, also central to the Hanafi Deoband ideology, considers marriage as a safeguard for chastity and vital to the development and stability of the family, and, by extension, the well-being of society. In this respect, marriage is regarded as imperative and

[58] Ali, "Sexual Ethics and Islam," 12.

incumbent upon every physically and financially able adult Muslim man and woman. Numerous hadith in the corpus of Islamic popular literature on marriage are cited to encourage its uptake and preservation, while Quranic verses like Q 30:21 and Q 2:187, that attest to mutuality and reciprocity are also invoked.[59]

Desai maintains this marriage imperative by giving precedence to the wife's feelings and morale, possibly enacting a shift away from other juristic practice common in South Africa. Research in South Africa for example, reveals the more common experience to be that women are faced with a "marriage at all costs" approach by the ulama and expected to accept unjust and potentially dangerous marital relationships in the "spirit of reconciliation" even in instances of abuse and infidelity. Women report that they are unable to get assistance in exiting a marriage and that abuse by husbands is ignored by some ulama, illustrating that the marriage imperative in these instances functions in opposition to mutuality and reciprocity to the degree that it also threatens a woman's well-being.[60]

Desai's form of articulation of the marriage imperative in fatwa A potentially moderates the prominent male sexual rights discourse. He uses both a discourse of mutuality, and a discourse related to feelings and morale – the latter two being indicators of health and well-being. His position in this fatwa is in harmony with student, Zakariyya Desai's approach in another fatwa D[61] of the sample. The mufti is faced with a question which reads:

> I got married 2 years ago but my wife seems to be unhappy. She says I do not satisfy her sexually.

In his response Zakariyya Desai says:

> At the outset, it is important that you consider the feelings of your wife in this regard. If she claims that you are not satisfying her, you should

[59] Abdur Rahman I. Doi and Abdalhaqq Bewley, *Woman in Shari'ah:(Islamic law)*. Ta-Ha Publishers Limited, (1989), 31; Esposito, John L. *Women in Muslim Family Law*. NY: Syracuse University Press, (1982), 14-15.

[60] Nina Hoel, "Engaging religious leaders: South African Muslim women's experiences in matters pertaining to divorce initiatives," *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 2 (2012), 187-188. Hoel argues that due to the lack of agency experienced by women in terms of divorce, a "marriage at all costs" approach of the marriage imperative can severely hamper the sexual reproductive health choices of women in perilous marriage situations.

[61] Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 16306, 2008. Available from:
<http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/16306>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

> obtain professional medical advice on this issue. You are newly married and should avoid any type of resentment from your wife.…

The distinction is that Zakariyya Desai's response is in the context of prioritising female sexual satisfaction. He foregrounds the wife's feelings before dealing with the husband's biomedical health concerns later on in the fatwa, particularly for the wife's sexual fulfilment. The newly married status of the couple has a bearing on Zakariyya Desai's answer, also influencing his interests in saving the marriage.

By relying on these two discourses, that of mutuality and emotional and psychological well-being, these muftis locate their answers away from the jurisprudential logic of marriage towards ethical exhortations that reflect Ali's observations earlier.[62]

2- Effective Sexual Communication

As additional features of mutuality in marriage, Desai in fatwa A also advocates for other strategies, such as an effective communication of sexual concerns between spouses. Docrat in fatwa C also advocates for this. Kodir argues that jurists may exhibit nuanced interpretive approaches in the *fiqh* to the 'cursing angels' hadith (also found in Docrat's answer). This demonstrates that even as jurists use primary sources to buttress dominant discourses, they endeavour to allow women the space to refuse sex and to allow for their sexual fulfilment, albeit minimally. Some interpretations of the "cursing angels" hadith, for example, state that she will only be sinful and therefore cursed by angels dependent on her husband's emotions, like when he is angry at her refusal. Others suggest, however, that she is "entitled to reject her husband's call for sexual activity if it is certain to hurt her, or if she is engaged in fulfilling a religious obligation." These alternative interpretations, argues Kodir, provide a glimpse into legal scholarly attempts to create "opportunities for the woman to enjoy sexual relations or refuse them."[63]

The mufti's proposals in this regard are in synchrony with a study done in India on young wives that pointed to sexual communication as an effective strategy to prevent coercive sex and to afford young wives an opportunity to negotiate safe and voluntary sex. One of the key proposals of the study pointed to provisions by policy makers to make

[62] Ali, "Sexual Ethics and Islam," xxv.

[63] Kodir, Faqihuddin Abdul. *Hadith and Gender Justice: Understanding the Prophetic Traditions*. Cirebon: Fahmina Institute, (2007), 73-75.

sex education available to young women before they marry in order to enhance their sexual communication.[64]

3- A Benevolent Masculinity

In yet another strategy towards mutuality Desai promotes a benevolent masculinity. Bjorn Krondorfer and Stephen Hunt maintain that attempts to reconfigure and alter masculinities so that women are not prejudiced requires unsettling the triad of patriarchy; namely power, hierarchy and privilege. They state that "power proclaims and enforces gender disparity, hierarchy maintains it, and privilege denies that such disparity exists."[65]

Using their approach, we suggest that Desai, even as he subscribes to and is located in a hierarchical model of gender relations, also attempts to unsettle the prevailing gender disparity and prompts the petitioner towards a form of mutuality. He is cognizant of male privilege within the discursive legal space of marriage, and attempts to displace it with a benevolent masculinity that empowers and enables the wife. He says, "…*it is important that the husband takes the feelings, tempo etc. of the wife into consideration before becoming upset* …" Desai is aware of the gendered jurisprudential limitations placed on women in the context of sexual intimacy, and highlights the possible health and well-being repercussions of such limitations on the wife and ultimately the marriage and the family.

He nevertheless remains caught within the male privilege of the jurisprudential framework. For example, he continues to promote a benevolent masculinity that is embedded in classical jurisprudential doctrine associated with ideas of the wife's "marital obligations" and "sin" in rejecting her husband in both the petition and the answer. The idea that the wife has a mediated God-believer relationship, through her obligations to be submissive and obedient to her husband, and the threat of divine disapproval at her refusal, which becomes a coercive mechanism diminishing her human and spiritual wholeness within the bedroom, prevails.

---

[64] Pande, Rohini Prabha, Tina Y. Falle, Sujit Rathod, Jeffrey Edmeades, and Suneeta Krishnan. "'If your husband calls, you have to go': understanding sexual agency among young married women in urban South India." *Sexual health* 8, no. 1 (2011), 102-109.

[65] Björn Krondorfer, and Stephen Hunt. "Introduction: Religion and Masculinities–Continuities and Change." *Religion and Gender* 2, no. 2 (2012), 198-200.

Halkano Abdi Wario, in a study on the constructions of masculinity amongst the peripatetic men of the *tablighi* movement, [66] suggests that by virtue of the apolitical stance of Deoband affiliated groups like the *tablighi jamat*, the hegemonic masculinity avoids "some of the most visible forms of masculine power in favour of non-political engagement, avoidance of heated debates of all nature, pacifism, and temporal delegation of household headship"; with the result that an ambivalent mix of different facets of masculine power exists in parallel with a normative, subservient and subordinate femininity. These are entrenched in the gender ideologies of the *tabligh* movement. In his study, Wario theorises the existence amongst the peripatetic Deoband *tabligh* men, of a fluid, alterable and reconstructable masculinity through a "transnational flow of practices of how to be proper Muslim men."[67] We argue that Desai, in this fatwa A, and Zakariyya Desai, in fatwa D, provide similar options for masculinities in the transnational online space. Thus, a similar mobility and fluidity of ideas of a benevolent masculinity is enacted in the transnational online space of askimam.org, potentially conditioning the hegemonic masculinity and in so doing, facilitating women's agency.

Discussion

The petitions in the above fatwas demonstrate that by negotiating, resisting or rejecting the discourse of female responsibility to fulfil male sexual need, women are making sexual choices informed by an ethics of mutuality and reciprocity. Some enact their capacity to refuse (fatwas A and C), and when these choices prove problematic for their partners, husbands may evoke the legal discourse of female responsibility to fulfil male sexual need, and frame these choices in the context of a spiritual threat - namely the suggestion that the choice not to have sex has consequences for the piety of a wife and her husband. Ancillary fatwas reveal that many women also balance pietistic concerns with sexual desire (fatwa S), and some are challenging the gender hierarchy in Muslim marriage (fatwas P and Q). The petitions also reveal that like the wives in the fatwas, some husbands, too, are concerned with mutuality in sexual relations (See fatwa D). Spouses continue to remain committed to

[66] For an explanation of this movement, see, Goolam Vahed. "Changing Islamic traditions and emerging identities in South Africa." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20, no. 1 (2000), 43-73. Vahed describes the *tabligh jamaat* as a proselytizing, pietistic, grassroots movement which is an offshoot of the Deoband movement, allied to it, and concerned with providing religious guidance on all matters. It is always led by Deoband-trained or Deoband-affiliated ulama.

[67] Halkano Abdi Wario, "Reforming Men, Refining Umma: Tablīghī Jamā' at and Novel Visions of Islamic Masculinity." *Religion and Gender* 2, no. 2 (2012), 253.

the classical legal tradition of Muslim marriage, even as they grapple with the dissonance it introduces with their expectations of mutuality within marriage (see analysis above of fatwas D, F, G).

Called upon to provide solutions to problems arising out of this dissonance the responses in the fatwas reveal how some muftis negotiate the complex networks of power in the discourses of male and female sexuality, modulating these with discourses of mutuality and reciprocity, ideas of fairness, and concerns for women's health and well-being. The analysis reveals that muftis' responses mirrored two interconnected observations made by Ali. The first is that even conservative muftis include concepts of reciprocity and mutuality in their responses. Second, "a strongly gendered understanding of male-female sexuality… [continues to permeate]…much contemporary Muslim discourse, including that produced in Western contexts."[68]

It could be argued that like some petitioners, some muftis on askimam.org, too, remain true to the classical Islamic legal tradition, but also understand that the sexual desires, expectations and experiences of ordinary Muslims within modern contexts function within the discourses of mutuality and reciprocity, ideas of fairness, and concerns for women's health and well-being.

Gregory Kozlowski argues that "fatwas are often significant for what they cannot or will not say, as well as for what they actually communicate".[69] Thus, we maintain that the absence of legal rationales and foundational sources in fatwa A as well as Desai's silence when dealing with a wife who refuses sex for no "valid" reason could be construed as the muftis tacit consideration for her resistance to one of the most essential dictums of a Muslim marriage - that of male sexual access and female sexual availability. Hence some muftis on askimam.org may realise that an undue reliance on their answers around distinctive gendered perspectives of male-female sexuality found in foundational sources will prove counterproductive to keeping the marriage intact and subsequently maintaining the stability of the family. This explains the trend to downplay male sexual rights and female sexual availability and the trend to rely instead on discourses of mutuality, reciprocity, fairness and well-being. In doing so they meet the lived realities of petitioners and their spouses and provide a means to navigate between the two paradigms of a Muslim marriage – moving from the legal, where ideas of dominion

[68] Ali, "Sexual Ethics and Islam," 9.

[69] Gregory C Kozlowski, "A Modern Indian Mufti," in *Islamic legal interpretation: muftis and their fatwas,* eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick and David Powers (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, (1996), 247.

produce undue systems of control in Muslim marriage, towards the ethical, where ideas of mutuality and reciprocity preside.

Conclusion

Considered as discourses between petitioners and mufti's, these fatwas and those in the larger study form an important component of the discursive Islamic tradition[70] providing glimpses into the "dynamics of continuity and change" within it.[71] This paper demonstrates that when called upon to provide solutions to problems arising out of the dissonance – experienced by wives and husbands in minority contexts – between *fiqh*-based marriage norms and modern lived realities, muftis maintain a continuity with past legal pedagogies and practices which determine Muslim marriage as dominion. However, they are also able to offer remedies in the idiom of present day concerns, where ordinary Muslim men and women's lived experiences of marriage are infused with ideas of mutuality, reciprocity, fairness and well-being. In the long term, this practice may predict the possible future reformulations of an ethics of marriage as mutuality and wellbeing.

Contrasting with scholarship, which regards some of Desai's formulations on gender relations in marriage as revolutionary,[72] this paper concludes instead that the framework of the fatwas featured herein remain within the traditional legal logic of male-female sexuality in marriage, and while they may promote change, muftis do not intend them to be revolutionary. Based on these findings here, the paper concludes, however, that through a reliance on the ethics of marriage and health and well-being located in notions of reciprocity and mutuality, some husbands, wives and muftis in online fatwas, like those of askimam.org, co-enact a discourse of jurisprudence on sexuality within

[70] I draw on anthropologist Talal Asad's reflections on Islam as a 'discursive tradition'. Asad asserts that this tradition consists of discourses which seek to instruct on the proper form and purpose of a practice which is established and therefore has a history. These discourses relate in a conceptual way to a *past* wherein the practice is instituted and established, and is important for understanding and reformulating the *future*, in which the said practice and its goal can best be secured or modified or abandoned. This occurs through a *present,* how the practice "is linked to other practices, institutions and social conditions". See Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, *Occasional Papers Series* (1986), 20.

[71] Larsen, "Men are the Protectors and Maintainers of Women," 202.

[72] In demonstrating Desai's position on domestic abuse in a particular fatwa, Kort refers to Desai's formulation as the "most revolutionary step towards Islamic reformation on the issue of violence against women" (Kort, "Dar al-Cyber Islam," 378).

contemporary Muslim marriage which is potentially partial to women's concerns.

References

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others." *American anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783-790.

Agha, Ambreen. "Religious Discourse in Tablighi Jama'at: A Challenge to Female Sexuality?" *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 2, no. 3 (2015): 1-16.

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Ali, Kecia. *Sexual ethics and Islam: Feminist reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence.* London: Oneworld, 2006.

Asad, Talal. "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, *Occasional Papers Series* (1986).

Barlas, Asma. "Believing Women" *in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002.

Bennett, Linda Rae. "Zina and the enigma of sex education for Indonesian Muslim youth." *Sex Education* 7, no. 4 (2007): 371-386.

Bunt, Gary R. *Islam in the digital age: E-jihad, online fatwas and cyber Islamic environments*. London: Pluto Press, (2003).

Chawki, Mohamed. "Islam in the Digital Age: Counselling and Fatwas at the Click of a Mouse." *J. Int'l Com. L. & Tech.* 5 (2010): 165.

Chaudhry, Ayesha S. *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition*. UK Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Campbell, Heidi A. "Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 64-93.

Doi, Abdur Rahman I. and Abdalhaqq Bewley. *Woman in Shari'ah: (Islamic law)*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers Limited, 1989.

El Fadl, Khaled Abou. *Speaking in God's name: Islamic law, authority and women*. UK: Oneworld Publications, 2014.

Esposito, John L. *Women in Muslim Family Law*. NY: Syracuse University Press,1982.

Hallaq, Wael B. “From Fatwās To Furü: Growth and Change in Islamic Substantive Law." *Islamic law and society* 1, no. 1 (1994): 29-65.

Hoel, Nina. "Engaging religious leaders: South African Muslim women’s experiences in matters pertaining to divorce initiatives." *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 2 (2012): 184-200.

Hoel, Nina. “Feminism and Religion and the Politics of Location: Situating Islamic Feminism in South Africa.” *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa,* no.19 (2013): 73-89.

Hoel, Nina and Sa’diyya Shaikh. “Sex as Ibadah: Religion, Gender, and Subjectivity among South African Muslim Women.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 1 (2013): 69-91.

Hossain, Mozaffar. “The story of fatwa.” *Interventions* 4, no. 2 (2002): 237-242.

Hidayatullah, Aysha A. *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. UK: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Imtoual, Alia and Shakira Hussein. “Challenging the myth of the happy celibate: Muslim women negotiating contemporary relationships.” *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 1 (2009): 25-39.

Izugbara, C. Otutubikey, “Patriarchal ideology and discourses of sexuality in Nigeria.” In *Understanding human sexuality seminar series*, vol. 2, (2004): 1-34.

Jīwan, ibn Abī Sa‘īd ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Ḥanafī al-Ṣadīqī. *Nūr Al-Anwār Ma‘a Ḥāshīyat Qamar Al-Aqmār* Delhi: Kutub Khanah Rashidiyah, 1960.

Kozlowski, Gregory C. “A Modern Indian Mufti”, in " *Islamic legal interpretation: muftis and their fatwas,* eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick and David Powers (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Kodir, Faqihuddin Abdul. *Hadith and Gender Justice: Understanding the Prophetic Traditions*. Cirebon: Fahmina Institute, 2007.

Krondorfer, Björn and Stephen Hunt. “Introduction: Religion and Masculinities–Continuities and Change.” *Religion and Gender* 2, no. 2 (2012): 194-206.

Kort, Alexis. “Dar al-Cyber Islam: Women, domestic violence, and the Islamic reformation on the World Wide Web.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2005): 363-383.

Kutscher, Jens. “The politics of virtual fatwa counseling in the 21st century.” *Masaryk UJL & Tech.* 3 (2009): 33.

Larsen Lena. “Men are the Protectors and Maintainers of Women: Three fatwas on spousal roles and rights.” in *Men in charge? : rethinking authority in Muslim legal tradition*, eds. Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger. London: Oneworld Publications, 2015.

Mahmood, Saba, *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Marcotte, Roxanne D. “Gender and sexuality online on Australian Muslim forums.” *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 1 (2010): 117-138.

Mama, Amina. *Beynd the masks: Race, gender and subjectivity*. Routledge, 2002.

Masud, Muhammad Khalid, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers. “Muftis, fatwas, and Islamic legal interpretation” in *Islamic legal interpretation: muftis and their fatwas,*3-32, eds. Masud, Muhammad Khalid, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Mathee, Mohamed Shahid. “Women's agency in Muslim marriage: ‘fatwas’ from Timbuktu.” *Journal for Islamic studies* 31 (2011): 75-95.

Metcalf, Barbara Daly, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's Bihishti Zewar* (trans). Berkeley: University of California Press, (1990).

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger. *Men in Charge?: rethinking authority in Muslim legal tradition*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2015.

Mir-Hosseini Ziba, “Muslim Legal Tradition and the Challenge of Gender Equality” in *Men in charge? : rethinking authority in Muslim legal tradition*, eds. Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger. London: Oneworld Publications, 2015.

Mir-Hoseini, Ziba. “Islamic Family Law and Social Practice: Anthropological Reflections on the Terms of the Debate,” *Family, Law and Religion: Debates in the Muslim World and Europe and Their Implications for Co-operation and Dialogue* (2009): 21-32.

Moosa Ebrahim, *What is a Madrasa?* Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2015.

Omar, A. Rashied. “Democracy and Multiple Muslim Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa* 7 (2004): 1-9.

Pande, Rohini Prabha, Tina Y. Falle, Sujit Rathod, Jeffrey Edmeades and Suneeta Krishnan. "'If your husband calls, you have to go': understanding sexual agency among young married women in urban South India." *Sexual health* 8, no. 1 (2011): 102-109.

Piela, Anna. “Muslim women's online discussions of gender relations in Islam.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 3 (2010): 425-435.

Seedat, Fatima. “Islam, feminism, and Islamic feminism: Between inadequacy and inevitability.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 2 (2013): 25-45.

Shaikh, Sa’diyya, “Transforming feminisms: Islam, women, and gender justice” in *Progressive Muslims: On justice, gender and pluralism*, ed. Safi, Omid. UK, Oxford: One World Publications, 2003), 147-162.

Shaikh, Sa ‘diyya. “Knowledge, women and gender in the hadīth: a feminist interpretation.” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 15, no. 1 (2004): 99-108.

Shaikh, Sa'diyya, Nina Hoel, and Ashraf Kagee. “Research report South African Muslim women: sexuality, marriage and reproductive choices.” *Journal for Islamic studies* 31 (2011): 96-124.

Silvers, Laury. “In the Book We have Left out Nothing": The Ethical Problem of the Existence of Verse 4: 34 in the Qur'an." *Comparative Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2006), 171-80.

Sisler, Vit, “European Courts' Authority Contested: The Case of Marriage and Divorce Fatwas On-Line.” *Masaryk UJL & Tech.* 3 (2009): 51.

Sisler, Vit, “Cyber counsellors: online Fatwas, arbitration tribunals and the construction of Muslim identity in the UK.” *Information, Communication & Society* 14, no. 8 (2011): 1136-1159.

Wadud, Amina. “The Ethics of Tawhid over the Ethics of Qiwamah” in *Men in charge? : rethinking authority in Muslim legal tradition*, eds. Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger. London: Oneworld Publications, 2015.

Thobani, Sunera. “Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (review).” *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 221-224.

Vahed, Goolam. “Changing Islamic traditions and emerging identities in South Africa.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20, no. 1 (2000): 43-73.

Wadud, Amina. *Inside the gender Jihad: women's reform in Islam*. UK: Oneworld Publications, (2006).

Wario, Halkano Abdi. “Reforming Men, Refining Umma: Tablīghī Jamā‘ at and Novel Visions of Islamic Masculinity.” *Religion and Gender* 2, no. 2 (2012): 231-253.

Weedon, Chris. *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory.* Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1989.

Zine, Jasmin. “Muslim women and the politics of representation.” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 19, no.4 (2002): 1-22.

Web references:

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 18511, 2010. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/18511>. [Accessed 15 October 2015]

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 18350, 2009. Available from:< http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/18350>. [Accessed 15 October 2015]

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 17537, 2009. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/17537>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 28553, 2014. Available from:<http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/28553>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 18350, 2009. Available from:< http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/18350>. [Accessed 15 October 2015]

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 16306, 2008. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/16306>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 32362, 2015. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/32362>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 15104, 2007. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/15104>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 31509, 2014. Available from:< http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/31509>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

Askimam.org. 2011. Fatwa # 14847, 2007. Available from: <http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/14847>. [Accessed 15 October 2015].

DarulFiqh. 2012. Profile of Mufti Ebrahim Desai. Available from: < http://darulfiqh.com/profile-of-mufti-ebrahim-desai-daamat-barakatuhum/> [Accessed 29 November 2015].

125-144 Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa *Vol. 23 No 2 (Dec. 2017)*

Queerying Scholarship on Christianity and Queer Sexuality: Reviewing Nuances and New Directions

Megan Robertson[1]

Abstract

Most reviews of scholarship on the intersections of Christianity and queer sexuality (particularly in Africa) tend to conclude that Christianity and queer sexuality are irreconcilably contradictory. This scholarship is often based on the conviction that Africa is largely heteronormative and homophobic. While a decolonial lens does not erase the actual lived experiences of those who experience sexual and religious dissonance and homophobic violence, it does alert scholars to the nuances and new directions of scholarship in this area. These trends move beyond the "irreconcilable contradiction" to more negotiated living at the intersections of belief and sexuality; to even charting a path to an arguably transformative religiosity. The purpose of this article is to review how the scholarship in this area has developed from the trajectory of the irreconcilable contradiction to the path of transformative religiosity. This article advocates for the importance of studies which focus on the lived experiences of queer religious people in order to highlight issues, practices, people, and theories which do not often take centre stage in the discipline of sociology or theology. This article makes use of queer and decolonial theories in order to analyse literature and to argue for the importance of examining the relationship between the lived experiences of queer people and religion in Africa. Further, it aims to encourage sociologists who study religion, and theologians who study gender, to engage in interdisciplinary and intersectional scholarship and develop more compelling theoretical frameworks, which engage with religion and sexuality as variable social structures through the lived experiences of people in the context of religion.

Key Terms: Queer sexuality, queer studies, intersectionality, Christianity, identity.

Introduction

The persistence of violence against queer people and their continued marginalisation in society has been linked through statistics and research to conservative religious, often Christian, beliefs. These religious beliefs have commonly been shown to support conservative

[1] Megan Robertson is a PhD Candidate working in the area of Religion and Social Transformation within Desmond Tutu Research Chair, Faculty of Arts, University of the Western Cape.

moral principles about individual sexual activity and gender roles. This rhetoric espoused by popular media as well as academia has largely positioned religion (especially the Abrahamic faiths) and queer sexuality in contradiction to one another. This has especially been the case with scholarship and popular discourse focusing on Africa, religion and queer[2] sexuality[3].

Scholarship has often positioned Africa as a conservatively religious continent which infuses cultural discourses of 'African-ness' with religious conservativism to create and sustain the perception of an irredeemably queer-phobic continent. Scholars have shown that anti-queer attitudes and religious moral claims have been dominated by discourses about queer sexualities as un-African and as secular western imports which go against inherent, God-ordained African heterosexuality[4]. It is possible that South Africa has been seen in a somewhat more forgiving light. Claims can be made to it being the first country in the world to enshrine protection for its citizens on the basis of sexual orientation and the fifth country to legalise same-sex unions[5]. However, research such as the survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2015 demonstrates that the country is not exempt from the dominant discourse characterising Africa. In this HSRC survey three quarters (76 percent) of the South African respondents agreed with the statement "God's laws about abortion, pornography and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late,"[6]

[2] I have chosen to use the term queer rather than LGBTI+ or other terms as it allows me to recognise the fluidity of identities and to explore a range of scholarly texts which encompass varied gendered and sexuality performances.

[3] Thabo Msibi, "The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa," *Africa Today* 58, no.1 (2011): 55-77; Louise Vincent and Simon Howell, "'Unnatural', 'Un-African' and Ungodly': Homophobic Discourse in Democratic South Africa," *Sexualities* 17, no. 4 (2014): 472 – 483; HSRC and The Other Foundation, 2015. "Progressive Prudes: A Survey of Attitudes Towards Homosexuality and Gender Non-Conformity in South Africa," https://theotherfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ProgPrudes_Report_d5.pdf/; Adriaan van Klinken, "Queer Love in a 'Christian Nation': Zambian Gay Men Negotiating Sexual and Religious Identities," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no.4 (2015): 947-964; Ezra Chitando and Tapiwa Mapuranaga, "Unlikely allies? Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) activists and church leaders in Africa," in *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Ezra Chitando and Adriaan van Klinken (New York: Routledge, 2016): 171-183.

[4] van Klinken, "Queer Love," 947 -964; Adriaan van Klinken and Masiiwa Gunda, 2012. "Taking up the Cudgels Against Gay Rights? Trends and Trajectories in African Christian Theologies on Homosexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no.1 (2012): 114-138.

[5] Wendy Isaack, "Equal in Word of Law: The Rights of Lesbian and Gay People in South Africa," *Human Rights* 30, no.3 (2003): 19-22.

[6] HSRC and The Other Foundation, "Progressive Prudes," 7.

with one in three people declaring "very strong"[7] support. Similar data emerged for the statement "women should obey their husbands."[8] These findings demonstrate how religious beliefs and attitudes continue to sustain patriarchal as well as heteronormative norms and values in South Africa. Thus, not only are religion and queer sexuality positioned as contradictory, but Africa and being 'African' has been lumped together with religion as a comrade in opposition to queer sexuality.

Fortunately scholarship has emerged which, through a decolonial and queer lens, provides a more nuanced perspective of the relationship between Christianity, queer sexuality and 'Africanness'. The purpose of this article is to review how the scholarship in this area has developed from the trajectory argument that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between religion (and African Christianity) and queer sexuality, toward the path of mapping out an arguably transformative religiosity.[9] In order to do this I first discuss the dominant literature which presents queer sexuality and religion (African Christianity), either as irreconcilably contradictory or as something which needs to be negotiated (with something always being sacrificed in the process.)[10] I then draw on literature which makes use of a queer and decolonial lens to discuss some of the literature which "talks back"[11] to the predominant scholarship and which charts the way forward toward a transformative religiosity. Lastly, I discuss some of the gaps which continue to persist in the literature and advocate for the importance of decolonial and queer studies which focus on the lived experiences of queer religious people, specifically in Africa. This article aims to highlight issues, practices, peoples, and theories which do not often take centre stage in the discipline of sociology or theology. Further, it aims to encourage sociologists who study religion, and theologians who study gender, to engage in interdisciplinary and intersectional scholarship and develop more compelling theoretical frameworks which engage with religion and sexuality as variable social structures through the lived experiences of people in the context of religion.

---

[7] HSRC and The Other Foundation, "Progressive Prudes," 7.

[8] HSRC and The Other Foundation, "Progressive Prudes," 7.

[9] This article is mainly concerned with literature discussing Christianity in relation to queer sexuality, although an examination of the literature on Islam, queer sexuality and Africa (and indeed other religious traditions) would be equally important components to discussing queer sexuality in Africa.

[10] It is important to note here that some of the literature discussed in this article drifts between the various broad arguments. Therefore the same work may be cited to illustrate differing points.

[11] bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,* Boston: South End Press, (1989).

The Irreconcilable Contradiction

Conservative or restrictive theological arguments place biblical Scripture as firmly opposed to same-sex sexual relations.[12] In these writings homosexual behaviour or feelings of sexual attraction to the same sex is characterised as "disordered, evil and sinful."[13] In this sense scripture is considered authoritative and, fixed on the matter and deviations from scripture, are considered deviant themselves. African theologians opposed to homosexuality have been shown to employ arguments resting on inculturation theology[14] and argue that "Christianity in Africa, if it seeks to be truly Christian and authentically African, cannot tolerate homosexuality."[15] Similar discourse has been used outside of Africa to characterise queer sexuality as a European or western import. Andrew Yip's[16] study on queer British Muslims relate how their communities often frame their non-normative sexualities as a "western disease" where Muslims are negatively influenced by the secular western culture, what Yip terms "westoxication."[17] Scholarship and discourse concerned with positioning queer sexuality as something 'western' or European continues to create a false binary between a liberal, accepting America/Europe and a backward, hostile Africa. Thus, the myth that Africa cannot be a sight of liberative, life-affirming religious experiences and institutions for queer people is created and sustained.

Some interpretations of the argument of the "irreconcilable contradiction" separates homosexual behaviour from homosexual identity. Here, the

---

[12] Richard Hays, The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, (1996); Robert Gagnon, The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics. Nashville: Abingdon Press, (2002); Dogara Gwamna, "Biblical Teaching on Marriage and Sex: A Case Study of Leviticus 18&20," in Biblical View of Sex and Sexuality from African Perspective, ed. S, Abogunrin and J, Akao (Nigeria: Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, 2006): 28–47; Bebson Igboin, "A Moral Appraisal of Homosexuality in Biblical, Western and Africa Worldviews," in Biblical View of Sex and Sexuality from African Perspective, ed. S, Abogunrin and J, Akao (Nigeria: Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, 2006): 340-358; Anna-Marie Lockard, "Homosexuality: Legally Permissible or Spiritually Misguided?," Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary 5, no.3 (2008): 135 – 167.

[13] Jodi O'Brien, "Wrestling the Angel of Contradiction: Queer Christian Identities," Culture and Religion 5, no.2 (2004): 184.

[14]"A type of Christianity that (re)values African cultural and religious traditions positively (though critically) and seeks to incorporate them in expressions of the Christian faith that are authentically African" (van Klinken and Gunda, "Taking up the Cudgels," 117).

[15] van Klinken and Gunda, "Taking up the Cudgels," 132.

[16] Andrew Yip, "Negotiating Space with Family and Kin in Identity Construction: The Narratives of British Non-Heterosexual Muslims," The Sociological Review 52, no.3 (2004): 341.

[17] Yip, "Negotiating Space with Family," 341.

act is a sin but the desire is an affliction. The response thus changes from outright condemnation and exclusion to a pastoral call for clergy to counsel homosexuals and to convert them back to heterosexuality.[18] This argument perpetuates views, which were prominent in the 1940s and 1950s, of homosexuality as a medical or psychological sickness to be cured.[19] This reasoning, I argue, relegates people identifying as queer, to the margins of the church and in need of more 'saving' than others. This negatively characterises queer individuals as infirm and excludes them from being actively contributing members of the church or the religion. Heterosexuals are thus placed in the role of saviour and queer individuals, in the role of sinner – thus, creating a problematic hierarchical theology of the concepts of 'sin' and 'saved'.

It is not only Christian theologians but also scholars and activists advocating on the side of queer rights and inclusion who find no harmony between queer sexuality and the church.[20] These arguments seem to rest on the conclusion that the church is irredeemably patriarchal and heteronormative. For example, using Cognitive Dissonance Theory, Pikria Meladze and Jac Brown[21] work with understandings that conflicting identities cause shame and internalised homonegativity (a negative attitude towards their own sexual orientation). Thus, they argue, that the inherent conflict between the views of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and sexuality among gay men, causes an incongruent identity which is harmful to the individuals' psychological health. In their research, the only way the gay men in their study seem to find congruency is through either leaving their religion or denying their sexuality. Similarly, Eric Rodriguez and Suzanne Oullette[22] describe a more temporary denial of one of these identities through

[18] Gagnon, "The Bible and Homosexual Practice," ; Lockard, "Homosexuality," 135-167.

[19] R.W. Holmen, *Queer clergy: A History of Gay and Lesbian Ministry in American Protestantism*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, (2004), 6.

[20] Eric Rodriguez and Suzanne Oullette, "Gay and Lesbian Christians: Homosexual and Religious Identity Integration in the Members and Participants of a Gay-positive Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no.3 (2000): 333 – 347; Adrian Coyle and Deborah Rafalin, "Jewish Gay Men's Accounts of Negotiating Cultural, Religious, and Sexual Identity: A Qualitative Study," *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality* 12, no.4 (2001):21- 48; Andre Grace and Kristopher Wells, "The Marc Hall Predicament: Queer Rights v. Institutional Church Rights in Canadian Public Education," *Canadian Journal of Education* 28, no.3 (2005): 237-270; Andrew Wood and Abigail Conley, "Loss of Religious or Spiritual Identities among the LGBT Population," *Counseling and Values* 59, (2014): 95-111; Pikria Meladze and Jac Brown, "Religion, Sexuality and Internalized Homonegativity: Confronting Cognitive Dissonance in the Abrahamic Religions," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, (2015): 1950 – 1962.

[21] Meladze and Brown, "Religion, Sexuality and Internalized Homonegativity," 1950-1962.

[22] Rodriguez and Oullette, "Gay and Lesbian Christians," 333-347

using compartmentalisation, by de-emphasising one of their identifications depending on the context. For example, when attending a religious institution, the gay identity is de-emphasised and, when attending a gay festival, the de-emphasis is on the religious identity.[23] However, Rusi Jaspal and Marco Cinnirella[24] question how appropriate these strategies are if religion is experienced as an integral part of a person's life narrative, and the meaning attached to other social identifications.

In Grace and Wells'[25] sociological examination of the Catholic Church in Canada, they seem to completely dismiss the role of the institutional church for queer Christians and argue for a complete separation of church and state schools. The authors cite arguments[26] which position the church as an outdated, traditional institution which goes against a modern democratic state's interest for equality of sexual orientation.[27] As illustrated by the article's title, "Queer Rights v. Institutional Church Rights in Canadian Public Education," the expanded argument of the article, namely, that the rights of queer people and the institutional church are opposing forces which will inevitably result in a winner and a loser, is clearly demonstrated.

The literature discussed above (all) shares a common conclusion that religious belief and practices particularly (though not exclusively) within the context of the church and a queer sexuality, inherently stand in contradiction to one another. This conclusion seems to offer little hope for queer Christians who cannot be 'respectable' Christians and queer, nor can they be 'good queers' and be religious. As Elizabeth Stuart[28] asserts, "queer Christians find themselves caught as it were between the devil and the rainbow, aliens in both lands." The argument seems to rest on a false conceptualisation of religious beliefs and practices as static. This assumption can be refuted when one considers the changing views

[23] Rodriguez and Oullette, "Gay and Lesbian Christians," 333-347; Coyle and Rafalin, "Jewish Gay Men's Accounts," 95-111.

[24] Rusi Jaspal and Marco Cinnirella, "Coping with Potentially Incompatible Identities: Accounts of Religious, Ethnic, and Sexual Identities from British Pakistani Men Who Identify as Muslim and Gay," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 49, no.4 (2010): 849-870.

[25] Grace and Wells, "The Marc Hall Predicament," 237-270.

[26] For example "[t]he judiciary has internalized much of 'traditional' religious dogma in this area and has tended to give precedence to conservative religious interests over the interests of equality of sexual orientation, especially when young people are involved" (Bruce MacDougall, *Queer Judgments: Homosexuality, expressions, and the Courts in Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, (2000):99-100.)

[27] Grace and Wells, "The Marc Hall Predicament," 262.

[28] Elizabeth Stuart, *Religion is a Queer Thing: A Guide to the Christian Faith for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People*. Ohio: Pilgrim Press, (1997), 13.

and practices of various churches and faith traditions in history regarding topics such as women's inclusion as clergy, remarriage of divorcees, and abortion. Further, these texts make little reference to how religion, sexuality and other identifications intersect and interact with each other in different spatial and temporal contexts. The literature discussed above therefore fails to take into account how individuals experience their religious and sexual identifications in their everyday lived realities. I will now turn toward another trajectory of scholarship which *does* work with more nuanced understandings of religious and sexual identities as variable, co-constitutive and intersecting. Furthermore, they begin to question how queer Christians experience, negotiate and reconcile these identifications.

Negotiating Sexuality and Religion

Scholars have demonstrated that some who identify as queer and as Christian employ a variety of strategies to negotiate (or converge) what is otherwise assumed to be an unnegotiable contradiction between identifications.[29] These strategies result from the experience of both sexuality and religiosity/spirituality being framed as intimately tied to individuals' whole being and life narratives.[30]

One strategy of negotiation which scholars identify, involves joining or building different religious spaces and communities that subscribe to theological interpretations which do not position homosexuality as a sin. Scott Thumma[31] examines, for instance, the case of the "gay

[29] Scott Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical," *Sociological Analysis* 52, no.4 (1991): 333-347; Rodriguez and Oullette,"Gay and Lesbian Christians," 333-347; Melissa Wilcox, "*Two Roads Converged: Religion and Identity Among Lesbian Transgender Christians*," PhD thesis, University of California (2000); Coyle and Rafalin, "Jewish Gay Men's Accounts," 21- 48; Kelly Schuck and Becky Liddle, "Religious Conflicts Experienced by Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* 5, no.2 (2001): 63-82; Andrew Yip, "Sexuality and the Church. Forum: The Catholic Church, Paedophiles and Child Sexual Abuse," *Sexualities* 6, no. 91 (2003): 60-64; Jaspal and Cinnirella, "Coping with Potentially Incompatible Identities," 849-870; Melissa Wilcox, "'Spiritual Sluts': Uncovering Gender, Ethnicity, and Sexuality in the Post-Secular," *Women's Studies* 41, no.6 (2012): 639-659; Wood and Conley, "Loss of Religious," 95-111; Meladze and Brown, "Religion, Sexuality and Internalized Homonegativity," 1950-1962; Igor Pietkiewicz and Monika Kolodziejczyk-Skyrzypek, "Living in Sin? How Gay Catholics Manage their Conflicting Sexual and Religious Identities," *Arch Sex Behav* 45 (2016): 1573-1585.

[30] Gill Valentine and Louise Waite, "Negotiating Difference through Everyday Encounters: The Case of Sexual Orientation and Religion and Belief," *Antipode* 44, no. 2 (2012): 474-492.

[31] Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity," 333-347.

evangelical"[32] identity where new religious communities are formed by melting together an evangelical Christian culture in a queer context. Melissa Wilcox[33] studied lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women's spirituality and its connections, or lack thereof, to religious organisations. Wilcox[34] found that all participants who identified as spiritual had some communal way to practice their spirituality in non-traditional ways as, for example, with "alternative religions such as Unitarian Universalism and Religious Science."[35] For the women in Wilcox's study, these forms of worship are not only a negotiating strategy, but are also part of the larger movement toward post-secular forms of religious expression which can be characterised as a blend of religious tradition and various cultural beliefs. These expressions are often reactions to addressing concerns about the inclusion of non-normative identifications in more 'traditional' religious traditions.[36]

Another concrete strategy of negotiation prioritises personal experiences of faith over institutional religion and religious authority structures. Yip's[37] work, for example, points to a postmodern move where queer Christians prefer individual spirituality rather than communal religiosity. This means a move away from rigid doctrines, ritual and practices in a community of religious people, to a personal, internal connection with the divine/spiritual, which is not arbitrated by an institution. Yip draws on the experiences of queer Christians to argue that this move can be attributed to the irredeemably patriarchal, undemocratic and exclusive Church which is resistant to change.

Other negotiating strategies have been illustrated by Jaspal and Cinnirella,[38] who studied how gay Muslims living in the United Kingdom choose to separate 'homosexual acts' which they engaged in (and which they viewed as wrong) from defining who they were. These acts were also seen as something which they could not control either because they were born with this 'sickness' or because they blame mainstream

[32] Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity," 344.

[33] Wilcox, "Spiritual Sluts," 639-659.

[34] Wilcox, "Spiritual Sluts," 639-659.

[35] Wilcox, "Spiritual Sluts," 644.

[36] Eva Midden, "Gender, Religion and New Media in the Netherlands: Rethinking the position of Dutch Muslims through Critical Multiculturalism and the Post-Secular," in *Religion, Equalities and Inequalities*,ed. Dawn llewellyn and Sonya Sharma (New York: Routledge, 2016):151-162.

[37] Andrew Yip, "The Persistence of Faith Among Nonheterosexual Christians: Evidence for the Neo Secularization Thesis of Religious Transformation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 2 (2002): 199-212.

[38] Jaspal and Cinnirella, "Coping with Potentially Incompatible Identities," 849 – 870.

'western' culture for influencing their actions. Jaspal and Cinnirella's work shows how queer religious people work within the framework of conservative or restrictive theological arguments to separate their actions from their identity in order to negotiate and make sense of the contradiction. The work of Igor Pietkiewiz and Monika Kolodziejczyk-Skyrzypek illustrates how Polish, Catholic gay men make use of a range of strategies to negotiate their identities including; "limiting their religious involvement, questioning interpretation of the doctrine, undermining the priests' authority, trying to reject homosexual attraction, putting trust in God's plan, using professional help, and seeking acceptance from clergy." [39]

Brian Gerow's[40] arguments problematise literature which presents negotiation between religious and sexual identity as the only way in which queer religious people navigate the apparent contradiction. These strategies allow views for and against same-sex relationships to exist but they do not seem to engage with long-standing traditions and institutions, and in this way the idea, that church and religion cannot change, is reinforced. These strategies require the individual alone to compromise aspects of themselves in order to find "congruency" with their identifications. These strategies then continue to operate within conservative and restrictive theological framings which present the queer individual as the "irredeemable problem,"[41] while the institution and social systems of power are left largely unquestioned. There also seems to be no space for possibilities where these seemingly incongruent identifications can be reconciled in life-affirming ways. Addressing this critique, the literature below problematises the institution of church while queer identities are conceptualised as possible catalysts for transforming understandings and practices of church and religion.

A Transformative Queer Religiosity

Much of the literature discussed thus far works from the base assumption that religious identity and queer sexuality can be theorised and is experienced as inherently incongruent, binary identifications. Scholars such as Cathy Cohen[42], Jodi O'Brien, Andrew Yip, Claudia

[39] Pietkiewicz and Kolodziejczyk-Skyrzypek, "Living in Sin?," 1573.

[40] Brian Gerow, "The Pulpit at the End of the Rainbow: How Queer Clergy Enter Into and Maintain Religious Occupations," MA diss., Portland State University, 2010.

[41] O'Brien, "Wrestling the Angel," 194.

[42] Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, (1997): 437 – 465; O'Brien, "Wrestling the Angel," 179 – 202; Yip, "Sexuality and the Church," 60-64; Andrew Yip, "Queering

Schippert, and Tiffany Steinwert who draw on queer theory as propounded by Judith Butler;[43] and queer theologians (such as Marcella Althaus-Reid and Adriaan van Klinken)[44] suggest that a different response exists in the form of a transformative queer religiosity. The emphasis in the literature below moves away from "negotiating" sexual and religious identifications towards reconciling and co-producing more life-affirming identifications.

Queer theology questions the assumed heterosexuality which frames theologies and argues for the potential of "dissident, marginalized epistemologies in thinking God" [45] which can transform the ways in which Christianity and church is understood and practiced. Robin Gorsline[46] points to how queer theology creates space for a queer Christendom or a "Queendom of God" which seeks to question and transform heteronormative understandings and practices of Christianity. Queer theology in the African context has made significant steps in using this queer lens to examine the possibilities and the realities of an emerging queer Christendom in Africa. Adriaan van Klinken and Lilly Phiri in their joint[47] and separate publications have also significantly contributed to examining the possibility (and indeed, developing) an African queer theology. Van Klinken[48], for example, incorporates understandings of individual agency and resistance to account for his participants' ability to co-produce understandings of love, religion and sexuality with their religious leaders and the church. Van Klinken's work shows that his participants do not simply negotiate around queer-phobic religious institutions and messages, but rather reconcile their sexuality and

---

Religious Texts: An Exploration of British Non-Heterosexual Christians' and Muslims' Strategy of Constructing Sexuality-Affirming Hermeneutics," *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 47-65; Claudia Schippert, "Queer Theory and the Study of Religion," *Revista de Estudos da Religilo* 4, (2005): 90 – 99; Tiffany Steinwert, "Homosexuality and the United Methodist Church: An Ecclesiological Dilemma," PhD thesis. Boston University, 2009.

[43] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (1988): 519-531.; Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge, (1990).

[44] Marcella Althaus-Reid, "On non-docility and indecent theologians: A response to the panel for Indecent Theology," *Feminist Theology* 11, no.2 (2003): 182 – 189.; Marcella Althaus-Reid, "From the Goddess to queer theology: The state we are in now," *Feminist Theology* 13, no.2 (2005): 265-272; van Klinken, "Queer Love," 947 -964.

[45] Althaus-Reid, "From the goddess," 271.

[46] Robin Gorsline, "Queering Church, Churching Queers," *Conversation, Conflict and Communit*y 49, no.11 (1999): 114.

[47] Adriaan van Klinken and Lilly Phiri, "'In the Image of God': Reconstructing and Developing a Grassroots African Queer Theology from Urban Zambia," Theology & Sexuality 21, no. 1 (2015): 36-52.

[48] van Klinken, "Queer Love," 947-964

religious faith through struggling with the church, the church leadership, and themselves to create new understandings of what it means to be Christian and queer. Van Klinken argues that queer Christians, such as the Zambian men in his study, have agency and resist discourses which frame them as evil and sinful by subscribing to and asserting more universal understandings of love (in relationships with others and God).[49] Similarly, the doctoral dissertation by Phiri[50] on identity construction, and the Masters dissertation by Thembani Chamane[51] focusing on the coming out experiences of gay Zulu Christians, document comparable strategies of agency and resilience. Queer theology thus provides an understanding of how queer Christians in Africa are co-producing a transformative, subversive theology.

The work of African queer theologians has made significant headway in framing Africa as a prime sight for exploring how a transformative queer religiosity may take shape. They have also illustrated the importance of paying attention to the complexities of the construction, deconstruction and intersection of identifications. However, as the decolonial theorist Francis Nyamnjoh[52] argues, binary and complete thinking exists only in the abstract. In reality, human experience reflects something much more messy and incomplete, and it is this incompleteness that should inform theoretical thinking. Therefore, I want to argue that a queer theology and decolonial lens are not the only factors which are necessary to support the idea of a transformative queer religiosity, but there is a need for research to focus on peoples' lived experiences.

Jodi O'Brien's ethnographic work, on how "*Wrestling the Angel of Contradiction*"[53] between queer and Christian identities gives rise to a particular expression of queer Christianity, is an important contribution to scholarship on queer religiosity. O'Brien's work shows how queer Christians are able to turn the popular rhetoric of conservative/restrictive theology of 'love the sinner, hate the sin', which usually frames the sinner as the queer individual and the sin as queer love, on its head. Rather, queer Christians in O'Brien's study frame the sinner as the

[49] van Klinken, "Queer Love," 947-964

[50] Lilly Phiri, *"Construction Sites": Exploring Queer Identity and Sexuality at the Intersections of Religion and Culture in Zambia*. PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal (2016).

[51] Thembani Chamane, "An Exploration of How Zulu Gay Men Negotiate their Christian and Cultural Beliefs in the Process of Coming Out." MA diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, (2017).

[52] Francis Nyamnjoh, "Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the Currency of Conviviality," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, no.3 (2017): 253-270.

[53] O'Brien, "Wrestling the Angel," 179-202

church and the sin as the institutional arrogance of filtering love. O'Brien makes the argument that some queer Christians seem to understand the apparent contradiction between their faith and sexuality, as their raison d'être, as they see it as part of their endeavour to create transformed, more inclusive understandings and expressions of Christianity. O'Brien's work demonstrates how, through studying the lived experiences of queer Christians, possibilities for escape from the space between "the devil and the rainbow"[54] are presented.

In Tiffany Steinwert's,[55] work on homosexuality and the United Methodist Church, she argues that, alongside theology, the ecclesiological identity and polity of the church needs to be interrogated.[56] Mark Jordan in *The Silence of Sodom*[57] makes a similar claim about the Catholic Church and argues that in order to challenge the restrictive stance of the church, scholars need to engage with, not only the theology and official policies or documents of the church, but also the clerical culture, rituals and traditions – essentially the institutional culture. These scholars point to the need to devote empirical attention to ecclesiology and churches institutional cultures. These scholars differ in their methods as Steinwert[58] focuses on analysing the policies and engaging with policy-makers, while Jordan[59] works with the understanding that church policies and doctrines are embedded in lived experience. However, they both maintain the argument that an understanding of the lives of queer members of the church must be made visible and audible, (and I add responsibly and rigorously theorised) in order to understand how church doctrines are experienced and resisted, and where there are possibilities for transformation. Amongst African scholars, outside of theology, similar work which embraces the lens of queer theory and which engages the institutional church in relation to queer Christian experiences has been scarce.

Moving Beyond the Contradiction

Much of the literature reviewed above uses the false assumption that queer sexuality and religion are two natural opposites as a springboard from which to conduct theoretical and empirical work. This often results

[54] Stuart, "Religion is a Queer Thing," *13.*

[55] Steinwert, Homosexuality and the United Methodist Church.

[56] Steinwert, Homosexuality and the United Methodist Church, vii.

[57] Mark Jordan, The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (2000).

[58] Steinwert, Homosexuality and the United Methodist Church.

[59] Jordan, "The Silence of Sodom".

in too narrow arguments which position queer, religious individuals either as irredeemable sinners, or as unreformed queers who believe in a false god (the Church) which will always condemn rather than welcome.

The assumption that queer sexuality and religion are in opposition also means that scholars concerned with queer experiences of religion often focus on how queer religious individuals negotiate between these two opposites and often how they *have to* compromise one or more of their identifications in order to navigate their everyday realities. In these instances religion or sexuality (or both) are presented as fixed, essentialised identities with no hope of being reconciled. However, in other areas of scholarship where a gender lens is cast onto religion - religion, gender, sexuality and other social identifications such as race have been shown to be constructed, performed and variable. The work of the queer African theology discussed above, Nancy Ammerman[60], Courtney Bender et al.[61], and Rachel Rinaldo[62] for example show how religion can be viewed as a variable social schema and identification which is significant in different ways at different times as it interacts with other identifications and contexts.

The predominant assumption that there exists a natural contradiction between queer sexuality and religion has also meant that studies have focused on 'gay moments.' I use this term as it reflects how the scholarship has largely been concerned with the experiences of men and focused almost exclusively on topics such as same-sex marriage, on the experience of coming out, or on other key moments where sexuality is performed or expressed (such as Jodi O'Brien, Melissa Wilcox, Brian Gerow, Darren Sherkat, Kylan de Vries and Stacia Creek, and Thembani Chamane)[63]. This exclusive focus on moments of sexuality has also meant that studies on religion often emphasise negative experiences of violence and marginalisation, especially within the realm of the Church.

---

[60] Nancy Ammerman, "Religious Identities and Religious Institutions," in *Handbook of Sociology of Religion,* ed. Michelle Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 207-224; Nancy Ammerman, "2013 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture: Finding Religion in Everyday Life," *Sociology of Religion* 75, no.2 (2014): 189-207.

[61] Courtney Bender et al., eds. *Religion on the Edge: De-centering and Re-centering Religion First Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, (2012).

[62] Rachel Rinaldo, *Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia*. New York: Oxford University Press (2013).

[63] O'Brien, "Wrestling the Angel," 179-202; Wilcox, "*Two Roads Converged.";* Wilcox, "'Spiritual Sluts'," 639-659; Gerow, "The Pulpit at the End of the Rainbow,"; Darren Sherkat, Kylan de Vries, and Stacia Creek, 2010. "Race, Religion and Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage," *Social Science Quarterly* 91, no.1 (2010): 80-97; Chamane, "An Exploration of How Zulu Gay Men,".

Yip[64] and Ammerman[65] have critiqued this and argued that scholars need to go beyond focusing primarily on acts which confine sexuality to certain moments of expression but should work with it as intersecting with all aspects of a person's lived reality. Ammerman[66] argues,

> In looking at the places where identity work was obvious, we have perhaps avoided the basic questions about social life that ought to inform any attempt to understand the place of religion in it. How and why do people act as they do? What guides and constrains that action? Under what conditions do people orient themselves toward religious institutions and realities?

This shift from 'gay moments' to everyday lived experiences allows for research to explore more nuanced, holistic understandings of queer experiences in different contexts.

The new trends in scholarship highlighted in this article begin to move beyond the assumption that queer sexuality and religion are contradictory. This area of scholarship provides spaces to think beyond finding new spaces and religions for queer Christians to find congruency in their identifications. It also goes beyond arguing for the mere inclusion of people of 'diverse' identities into current religious institutions. Rather, it advocates for the deconstruction and transformation of existing normative identifications and systems of power within Christianity and the church. However, so far the queer lens only seems to map out the potential that queer Christian experiences and queer theology may have for transforming understandings of Christianity and church. For example, in O'Brien's work, if "living the contradiction" can create change, what is not clear is how it does so and to what extent. It cannot be assumed that a queer Christian sitting in the pews (or indeed standing at the pulpit) of the church will bring about change. Similarly, if a church or religious institution changes its policies and doctrines on accepting same-sex marriage and gay and lesbian ministers – this does not necessarily impact on the heteronormative traditions, theologies, readings and rituals which make up the life of the institution. Little nuanced attention has been given so far to answering these questions by examining how individual Christian or religious identities are experienced in relation to the wider institutional culture and rhetoric of the church.

Scholarship which has employed queer, intersectional, decolonial lenses through which to examine queer Christianity in Africa has thus far been

[64] Yip, "Sexuality and the Church," 63.

[65] Ammerman, "Religious Identities," 207-224.

[66] Ammerman, "Religious Identities," 209.

dominated by the discipline of theology. Unfortunately, much of the literature around a transformative queer religiosity also lacks sociological analysis of how race, class, culture and other social divisions characterise everyday queer Christian experiences. Perhaps this is because much of the scholarship (especially sociologically) has taken place in 'western' contexts. This has meant that there has been a lack of rigorous scholarship concerned with how the institutional church and religion interacts with the everyday lived experiences of queer Christians in Africa. It seems therefore, that disciplines outside of theology have not pulled their theoretical and empirical weight when it comes to debunking the myth that Africa cannot be a sight where possibilities of a transformative queer religiosity can be explored.

Conclusion

Christianity has largely been characterised as being overtly and irreconcilably anti-queer. This argument has been amplified when characterising a queer-phobic African Christianity linked to widely held conservative theologies and cultural beliefs. Through a review of the literature, I have argued that there is a trend in scholarship which has begun to debunk both these myths. It is clear, however, that there is still a need for more rigorous research (internationally and in Africa) which does not abstract the conversation but which focuses on queer lived experience and which locates these in spatial and temporal contexts. In order to sustain and deepen the scholarship concerned with framing a transformative queer religiosity, scholars should go beyond exploring moments within queer life but focus on everyday experiences in order to explore more nuanced, holistic understandings of queer experiences in different contexts. There is also a need for disciplines outside of theology to focus on how institutionalised religion (shaped by theology, doctrine and policy) produce certain identifications - but also how the lived experiences of queer Christians and religious people influence institutional cultures and the practices and policies which shape it. Furthermore, this line of enquiry can support and nuance understandings of how identifications and social institutions continually shape, contest, alter and reinforce transformative queer religiosities. Lastly, in order to deconstruct binaries which seem to exclude Africa from possibilities of hope for queer religious people, it is pertinent that this scholarship begins to emerge more strongly from an African context.

Bibliography

Althaus-Reid, Marcella. "From the Goddess to queer theology: The state we are in now." *Feminist Theology* 13, no.2 (2005): 265-272.

Althaus-Reid, Marcella. “On non-docility and indecent theologians: A response to the panel for Indecent Theology.” *Feminist Theology* 11, no.2 (2003):182-189.

Ammerman, Nancy. “2013 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture: Finding Religion in Everyday Life.” *Sociology of Religion* 75, no.2 (2014): 189-207.

Ammerman, Nancy. “Religious Identities and Religious Institutions.” In *Handbook of Sociology of Religion,* edited by Michelle Dillon, 207-224. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bender, Courtney, Wendy Cadge, Peggy Levitt and David Smilde, eds. *Religion on the Edge: De-centering and Re-centering Religion First Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (1988): 519-531.

Butler, *Judith. Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge, (1990).

Chamane, Thembani. “An Exploration of How Zulu Gay Men Negotiate their Christian and Cultural Beliefs in the Process of Coming Out.” MA diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017.

Cohen, Cathy. “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, (1997):437-465.

Coyle, Adrian and Deborah Rafalin. “Jewish Gay Men’s Accounts of Negotiating Cultural, Religious, and Sexual Identity: A Qualitative Study.” *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality* 12, no.4 (2001):21-48.

Dogara Gwamna, “Biblical Teaching on Marriage and Sex: A Case Study of Leviticus 18&20.” In *Biblical View of Sex and Sexuality from African Perspective,* edited by S, Abogunrin and J, Akao, 28-47. Nigeria: Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, 2006.

Elizabeth Stuart, *Religion is a Queer Thing: A Guide to the Christian Faith for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People*. Ohio: Pilgrim Press, (1997), 13.

Ezra Chitando and Tapiwa Mapuranaga. “Unlikely allies? Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) activists and church leaders in Africa.” In C*hristianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, edited by Ezra Chitando and Adriaan van Klinken, 171-183. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Gagnon, Robert. T*he Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.

Gerow, Brian. “The Pulpit at the End of the Rainbow: How Queer Clergy Enter Into and Maintain Religious Occupations.” MA diss., Portland State University, 2010

Gorsline, Robin.“Queering Church, Churching Queers.” *Conversation, Conflict and Communit*y 49, no.11 (1999): 114.

Grace, André and Kristopher Wells. “The Marc Hall Predicament: Queer Rights v. Institutional Church Rights in Canadian Public Education.” *Canadian Journal of Education* 28, no.3 (2005):237-270.

Hall, Stuart. “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, 1-17. London: Sage Publications, 1996.

Hays, Richard. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

Holmen, R.W. *Queer clergy: A History of Gay and Lesbian Ministry in American Protestantism*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004.

hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,* Boston: South End Press, 1989.

HSRC and The Other Foundation, 2015. “Progressive Prudes: A Survey of Attitudes Towards Homosexuality and Gender Non-Conformity in South Africa*.”* https://theotherfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ProgPrudes_Report_d5.pdf/ (Accessed 4 February, 2018).

Igboin, Bebson. “A Moral Appraisal of Homosexuality in Biblical, Western and Africa Worldviews.” In *Biblical View of Sex and Sexuality*

from African Perspective, edited by S, Abogunrin and J, Akao, 340-358. Nigeria: Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, 2006.

Isaack, Wendy. “Equal in Word of Law: The Rights of Lesbian and Gay People in South Africa.” *Human Rights* 30, no.3 (2003):19-22.

Jaspal, Rusi and Marco Cinnirella. “Coping with Potentially Incompatible Identities: Accounts of Religious, Ethnic, and Sexual Identities from British Pakistani Men Who Identify as Muslim and Gay.” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 49, no.4 (2010):849-870.

Jordan, Mark. *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Lockard, Anne-Marie. “Homosexuality: Legally Permissible or Spiritually Misguided?.” *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 5, no.3 (2008):135-167.

MacDougall, Bruce. *Queer Judgments: Homosexuality, expressions, and the Courts in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

Meladze, Pikria and Jac Brown. “Religion, Sexuality and Internalized Homonegativity: Confronting Cognitive Dissonance in the Abrahamic Religions.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, (2015):1950-1962.

Midden, Eva. “Gender, Religion and New Media in the Netherlands: Rethinking the position of Dutch Muslims through Critical Multiculturalism and the Post-Secular.” In *Religion, Equalities and Inequalities*, edited by Dawn llewellyn and Sonya Sharma, 151-162. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Msibi, Thabo. “The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa.” *Africa Today* 58, no.1 (2011):55-77.

Nyamnjoh, Francis. “Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the Currency of Conviviality.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, no.3 (2017):253-270.

O’Brien, Jodi. “Wrestling the Angel of Contradiction: Queer Christian Identities.” *Culture and Religion* 5, no.2 (2004):184.

Phiri, Lilly. "Construction Sites": Exploring Queer Identity and Sexuality at the Intersections of Religion and Culture in Zambia." PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2016.

Pietkiewicz, Igor and Monika Kolodziejczyk-Skyrzypek. "Living in Sin? How Gay Catholics Manage their Conflicting Sexual and Religious Identities." *Arch Sex Behav* 45 (2016):1573-1585.

Rinaldo, Rachel. *Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Rodriguez, Eric and Suzanne Oullette, "Gay and Lesbian Christians: Homosexual and Religious Identity Integration in the Members and Participants of a Gay-positive Church." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no.3 (2000):333-347.

Schippert, Claudia. "Queer Theory and the Study of Religion." *Revista de Estudos da Religilo* 4, (2005):90-99.

Schuck, Kelly and Becky Liddle. "Religious Conflicts Experienced by Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* 5, no.2 (2001):63-82.

Sherkat, Darren, Kylan de Vries, and Stacia Creek, 2010. "Race, Religion and Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage" *Social Science Quarterly* 91, no.1 (2010):80-97.

Steinwert, Tiffany. "Homosexuality and the United Methodist Church: An Ecclesiological Dilemma." PhD thesis, Boston University, 2009.

Thumma, Scott. "Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical." *Sociological Analysis* 52, no.4 (1991):333-347.

Valentine, Gill and Louise Waite. "Negotiating Difference through Everyday Encounters: The Case of Sexual Orientation and Religion and Belief." *Antipode* 44, no. 2 (2012):474-492.

Van Klinken, Adriaan and Lilly Phiri. "'In the Image of God': Reconstructing and Developing a Grassroots African Queer Theology from Urban Zambia." Theology & Sexuality 21, no. 1 (2015): 36-52.

Van Klinken, Adriaan and Masiiwa Gunda. 2012. “Taking up the Cudgels Against Gay Rights? Trends and Trajectories in African Christian Theologies on Homosexuality.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no.1 (2012):114-138.

Van Klinken, Adriaan. “Queer Love in a ‘Christian Nation’: Zambian Gay Men Negotiating Sexual and Religious Identities,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no.4 (2015): 947-964.

Vincent, Louise and Simon Howell. “‘Unnatural’, ‘Un-African’ and Ungodly’: Homophobic Discourse in Democratic South Africa.” *Sexualities* 17, no. 4 (2014):472-483.

Wilcox, Melissa. “’Spiritual Sluts’: Uncovering Gender, Ethnicity, and Sexuality in the Post-Secular.” *Women’s Studies* 41, no.6 (2012):639-659.

Wilcox, Melissa. “*Two Roads Converged: Religion and Identity Among Lesbian Transgender Christians*.” PhD thesis, University of California, 2000.

Wood, Andrew and Abigail Conley. “Loss of Religious or Spiritual Identities among the LGBT Population.” *Counseling and Values* 59, (2014):95-111.

Yip, Andrew. “Negotiating Space with Family and Kin in Identity Construction: The Narratives of British Non-Heterosexual Muslims.” *The Sociological Review* 52, no.3 (2004):341.

Yip, Andrew. “Queering Religious Texts: An Exploration of British Non-Heterosexual Christians’ and Muslims’ Strategy of Constructing Sexuality-Affirming Hermeneutics.” *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 47-65.

Yip, Andrew. “Sexuality and the Church. Forum: The Catholic Church, Paedophiles and Child Sexual Abuse.” *Sexualities* 6, no. 91 (2003):60-64

Yip, Andrew. “The Persistence of Faith Among Nonheterosexual Christians: Evidence for the Neo Secularization Thesis of Religious Transformation.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 2 (2002):199-212

145-166 Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa *Vol. 23 No 2 (Dec. 2017)*

Gender Perspectives and African Scholarship: Blind spots in the field of religion, media, and culture

Lee Scharnick-Udemans[1]

Abstract

The cases of Prophet Paseka Motsoeneng, also known as Pastor Mboro, and Prophet Lesego Daniel – two controversial religious leaders in South Africa – caught media headlines between 2016 and 2017 when the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) released its report after an investigation into the commercialisation of religion and the abuse of people's belief systems. A survey of reporting on the matter on popular news sites (following the release of the report) show that while Daniel and Mboro's reaction to the report, and the findings of the report received widespread media coverage, their abuse of women and young girls received significantly less coverage, by both the media and Commission. Despite the complaints lodged by gender justice NGOS in June 2011 on the sexual abuse of women and girls in Mboro's congregation; it was only when the matter became an economic one – i.e. the abuse of people's belief systems in "profiting the prophets" – that the media and the state became interested. The lack of "gender interest" in the media is widely attested to in scholarship, at the intersections of religious studies, media studies, and cultural studies, which prides itself on well-established track records of interdisciplinary work. Hence, the "media turn" in the study of religion has played a crucial role in reconfiguring understandings of pertinent contemporary geo-political and social issues. Despite the identification of gender as a blind spot, in both media reporting and scholarship in the field, by leading scholars such as Mia Lovheim and Joyce Smith, further "blind spots" in the field and in the vision of those who have been at the helm of its development and advancement is evident, as I will show in this article. In identifying gender as a missing variable in the discussions, what is absent is a theorisation of this absence. When dealing with cases in Africa, it seems that an intersectional feminist approach requires at least two considerations – the first is that feminist scholars of religion and media may want to avoid the propagation of the perpetually oppressed, pious African woman being exploited at the hands of a powerful charismatic leader. The second consideration is the very real Afro-pessimism that accompanies such reporting – the spectacle of apparently backward African religious practices attracts the attention of the world, while child marriage in right-wing Christian conservative America, for example, goes under the radar. How should feminist scholars

[1] Lee Scharnick Udemans (PhD) is a senior researcher and lecturer, for the Desmond Tutu Research Chair for Religion and Social Transformation, at the University of the Western Cape. Working under the supervision of Professor David Chidester she completed her PhD in 2016. Contact details: lscharnickudemans@uwc.ac.za

working at the intersections of religion, media and cultural and religious studies negotiate the sexualisation and racialisation of African bodies within parallel constructions of sexual violence and Afro-pessimism? Using the case study of CRL in South Africa, this article makes a case for theorising the study of gender, religion, and media outside of the epistemological and contextual frame of western sensibilities and motivates instead for a feminist intersectional lens to avoid the double bind of sexism and racism in the analyses offered.

Introduction

Despite the complaints lodged in June 2011 by Sonke Gender Justice and People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) with the Commission on Gender Equality and The South African Human Rights Commission, of Prophet Paseka Motsoeneng's (hereafter referred to as Pastor Mboro) sexual abuse of women, the case only gained media attention in 2017 when the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities' (CRL) completed their investigation of Mboro together with other charismatic leaders such as Prophet Lesego Daniel who made his congregants eat grass and drink petrol.[2] The report dealt almost exclusively with the economics of religious exploitation with little space and attention paid to the abusive ways in which Mboro and Daniel dealt with women.[3] The media's reporting of the abuses, too, placed far more emphasis on the economics. The focus was on the call for churches to now reveal their financial statements; for churches to be taxed; and for churches to be registered – the bodies of the women who these prophets literally trampled on lay unattended both in the media reports as well as the actual report itself.

Interestingly, even the Commission on Gender Equality, which received the first complaints from the NGOs in 2011, refused to investigate, stating that: "the CGE respects people's religious beliefs as they are protected by the Constitution, with the understanding that those people exercised their right to go to Pastor Motsoeneng's church voluntarily".[4] While the tension between the constitutional rights to freedom of

[2] Nemakonde, Vhahangwele. 2015. Pastor Mnguni makes congregation eat snakes. https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/423976/pastor-mnguni-makes-congregation-eat-snakes (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

[3] CRL Pilot Report. *The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities: Pilot Report Commercialization of Religion in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2016.

[4] Sonke News. 2013. Update on Sonke's Complaint against Pastor 'Mboro' in 2011. http://genderjustice.org.za/news-item/update-on-sonke-s-complaint-against-pastor-mboro-in-2011/ (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

religious belief versus the protection of those who commit sexual offenses under the guise of 'freedom of religious belief', is out of the scope of this paper. However, the absence of theorising on gender in these matters in media reports, the CRL report, and the interdisciplinary scholarship in these areas deserves some attention. Within systems of overlapping oppressions (white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity) that encourage abuse and protect sexual abusers, how does an intersectional analysis help us to consider our scholarship on gender, religion and media differently?

Through a critical review of some of the recent literature produced in the interdisciplinary spaces of religion, media and cultural studies, this paper will, firstly theorise the absence of gender as an analytical framework and pertinent area of research inquiry in the study of religion, media, and culture. Secondly, it will investigate the relevance and utility of the contested yet pervasive mediatisation of religion theory for studies of religion, gender, and media particularly from a South African perspective. Finally, through a brief content analysis of a recent instance of "religion in the media," this article will explore some of the material, discursive, and epistemological possibilities of gender and intersectional feminist analytical perspectives for understanding the ways that religion and media are entangled within the broader socio-political milieu. The paper concludes by arguing that while the interdisciplinary track record of media, religion, and cultural studies is laudable, this interdisciplinary "canon" would benefit from an intersectional turn that takes gender and socio-political contexts within Africa more seriously.

Double Blind Spots: Gender and Africa

There exists an extensive inter-disciplinary and inter-contextual corpus on religion and media (See, Morgan 2008, Engelke 2010, Meyer and Moors, De Vries 2008, Hjarvard 2012, Hirschkind 2011, Eisenlohr 2012, 2017). However, in terms of reviewing the literature pertinent to the topic of gender, religion, and media, particularly in Africa, this article is both limited and characterised by an overwhelming dearth. It is upon the basis of this constitutive absence, of gender and Africa from the "mainstream" and definitive scholarly corpus on religion and media that I have chosen to limit my discussion to brief but illustrative descriptions of gender's absence in extended edited collections that are often presented as the most expansive view of the field.

In the 2011 publication, an edited collection authoritatively entitled, Religion*, Media, and Culture: A Reader* (Gordon Lynch, Jolyon Mitchell

and Anna Strhan) included one article about the intersections of religion, gender, and media. In 2008, a publication with an equally commanding title, *Key words in Religion, Media and Culture,* edited by Professor of Religion, David Morgan, featured thirteen key terms contributed by authors working in the fields of religious studies, media studies, anthropology and sociology, education, and historical studies. In this collection, the term gender is only ever referred to in a perfunctory manner, as one of the obligatory "other" aspects of human identity, such as race, class, sexual orientation and ethnicity, that warrants mention but not focussed attention. Earlier influential works such as *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture,* which is credited with mapping out the state and future of the field, contained only one contribution that addressed gender explicitly.[5] *Practising Religion in the Age of the Media* was ostensibly a follow up and update to the former, written in response, to the spectacular rise of the internet.[6] This paradigmatic contribution to the field did not include a chapter or focus on gender. *Media, Religion, and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges* (2013) therefore arrived as a much needed response to, and assessment of, the gender blind spot.

Editor of the collection, Professor in Sociology of Religion, Mia Lövheim's involvement in the development of religion, culture, and media as a composite interdisciplinary field can be traced to the first biennial conference of what would become the International Society for Media, Religion, and Culture in 1993. Together with an established track record as a religion and media specialist she was well poised to provide both a historical and critical account of gender's neglect within the field. In perusing the field in a much more detailed manner than I am able to do in this article, Lövheim's assessment concurs with the evaluation of this paper, that although important research on media and religion inspired by gender perspectives has taken place, "gender has been a marginal issue in central publications presenting research on media, religion and culture".[7] Furthermore, in trying to make sense of gender's invisibility in this field, Lövheim suggests that, "The historical legacy of gendered rules and traditions structuring the positions of men and women within academic life plays an important part, as well as conceptions of gender

[5] Hoover, Stewart and Knut Lundby., eds. *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997).

[6] Stewart Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark., eds. *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

[7] Lövheim, Mia, ed. *Media, Religion, and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*. (Routledge: New York, 2013).

and feminist studies within dominant discourses of particular scholarly disciplines."[8] Although this point can be widely attested to, it is not often well substantiated. Lövheim's explanation is a convincing exception.

According to Lövheim, the shift from technologically and institutionally deterministic studies of media, to research focussed on the consumptive and interpretive practices of audiences, as articulated most cogently by Hoover and Lundby,[9] showed some promise in terms of including gender as a serious analytical category and framework. However, within the context of this shift, gender has remained mainly an "add-on" category, a descriptor, in determining differences in media use and consumption.[10] I argue, that the culturalist turn championed by Hoover and Lundby[11] and taken up *en masse* by scholars of religion and media, for all its merits, has to a large extent succeeded in disengaging media from the specificities of its socio-political functions and environments. The move away from institutionalised religion to the "meaning making practices of everyday life" has positively yielded more nuanced definitions and explanations of what religion and media are and what they do. Through this approach, religion was freed of its institutions and dogma. Forms of art and literature that were once regarded as too "lowbrow" for academic consumption were opened as new and credible domains of scholarly investigation. However, an early bias, towards the experiences of young men in and of these "new" media (see Stuart Hall et al: 1980) meant that even within these more expansive iterations, women's experiences were side-lined, in favour of more sensational forms of media engagement often portrayed more explicitly in the behaviour of men.[12] Finally, Lövheim argues that a lack of analysis of power has been a major shortcoming in the development and advancement of the field and suggests that, "the historical legacy of gendered rules and traditions structuring the positions of men and women within academic life plays an important part, as well as conceptions of gender and feminist studies within dominant discourses of particular scholarly disciplines."[13] In light of this claim, she postulates that the collection attempts to beyond an "add

[8] Lövheim, Media, Religion, and Gender, 20.

[9] Hoover and Lundby, Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture.

[10] Lövheim, Media, Religion, and Gender, 22.

[11] Hoover and Lundby, Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture.

[12] Lövheim, Media, Religion, and Gender.

[13] Lovheim, Media, Religion, and Gender, 24.

gender" paradigm, toward an "add gender and stir" approach as an attempt to create critical discussion on the state of the field.[14]

Lövheim shows an awareness of feminism's critique of privileged perspectives and claims that "all chapters share the aim to problematize and nuance stereotypical understandings of gender, particularly "woman" and "femininity," and also "masculinity," in media texts and cultures."[15] Despite this tentative and inclusive approach the thirteen contributions in this volume all bear testimony to a glaring omission. While issues of gender and power are thoroughly theorized, and the case for the importance of gender's inclusion and centralisation in the interdisciplinary study of religion and media eruditely defended, not one article is about, from, or in conversation with the African context.

Religion, Gender, and Media in Africa

Given that many places in Africa, including South Africa, have been at the forefront of instituting projects in large-scale political reform that have led not only to media deregulation but also to new legislative features that have fundamentally altered the role of religion in public life, this oversight has resulted not only in a historical and contextual but also, an epistemological and perhaps ideological blind spot in the field of religion. These changes to the socio-political conditions in which both religion and media are situated have highlighted urgent questions about balancing fundamental human rights, including freedom of religion, freedom of expression, the right to dignity, and the very notion of equality, that apply to many contexts around the world – both established democracies and nations in transition.[16] Two cases in point are, first, the case of the CGE rejecting the complaint against Pastor Mboro's abuses of women; and second, the case of the Supreme Court of Appeal upholding the decision of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to fire one of its openly gay clergy, Ecclesia de Lange, on the basis of protection of religious freedom.[17]

In *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*, the editors argue that while the study of media in Africa is flourishing as a field of inquiry, these studies often focus more on questions about democracy and

[14] Lovheim, Media, Religion, and Gender.

[15] Lövheim, Media, Religion, and Gender.

[16] Rosalind Hackett, "Regulating Religious Freedom in Africa," Emory International Law Review, 25 (2011): 853-879.

[17] Sonke News. 2013. Update on Sonke's Complaint against Pastor 'Mboro' in 2011. http://genderjustice.org.za/news-item/update-on-sonke-s-complaint-against-pastor-mboro-in-2011/ (Accessed 28 March, 2018)

development, consequently ignoring the question of religion completely or treating religion as a peripheral issue.[18] This pattern of omission overlooks the crucial historical connections between media development and religion and particularly ignores the fact "that religious actors in Africa have long been at the forefront in taking up new media technologies in Africa."[19] Muhammed Haron's[20] discussion on the study of religion and media studies in Southern Africa implies that in a discipline that has been dominated by scholarship underpinned by theoretical frameworks from western countries; variations in understandings of what religion is; and how religion works, particularly within the socio-political milieu of Southern Africa, play a role in the continued paucity of studies from and about the region. The dominance and imposition of western definitions and theories have meant that scholars working in this area and in the region will most often need to clarify and redefine the basic concepts that frame their analysis. This article argues that while gendered perspectives have now been firmly placed on the agenda of the field by Lövheim and others, the study of religion and media remain epistemologically and contextually framed by western sensibilities or a lack of a more authentic feminist intersectional analysis of what religion and media are and how they operate. The utility of gender theories, concepts, research approaches, and methodology, particularly those emerging from the African context, for understanding the multiple and varied relationship between and among religion and media and its effect on contemporary social life, has been underestimated, to the detriment of the development of the field at large.

This article does not imply that there have been no studies from the African context that have addressed the religion, media, and gender triangulation; the issue I raise is the same as the issue raised about gender – this is not about "adding Africa and stirring" – this is about a genuine decolonial approach to religion, media and gender in Africa. Recently, scholar of Women's Studies and English Literature, Gabeba Baderoon,[21] has made a notable contribution to the field, especially with her latest book, *Regarding Muslims*. Baderoon uses religion and media as creative categories to probe the role of Muslims in South African history across a 350-year time period, spanning colonial, apartheid, and

[18] Hackett and Soares, "Introduction: New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa".

[19] Hackett and Soares, "Introduction: New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa", 1.

[20] Muhammed Haron, "Religion and the Media: Reflections on Their Position and Relationship in Southern Africa." *Global Media Journal: African Edition* 4 (1) (2010): 28-50.

[21] Gabeba Baderoon, *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014).

post-apartheid settings. As Tammy Wilks notes in her review of the book: "It sits comfortably as a postcolonial analysis, but also as a methodological guide for postcolonial feminist research (see page 164 in this journal). The book helps postcolonial African feminist scholars to reconfigure the conceptual and visual habits used to define and represent Muslims and Islam, both historically and contemporarily." The book serves as a welcome addition to the domination of the field by studies on Christianity, especially charismatic Pentecostal churches in the Southern African region and is evidence that research on Islam's interaction with the media is on the rise.[22] The existing studies have been inclined to include insights into the role of electronic media within religious settings as a part of broader discussions about religion in the region.[23] However, there exists, to the best of my knowledge, no extended study of religion, media, and gender from the Southern African context in particular, that addresses the ways in which gender as lived experience; theoretical framework; and analytical device, in its many complex relationships with religion and media, has been foregrounded. I argue that, given the relatively under-theorised nature of the field in the African context, critical gender perspectives in the form of methodology and theory, be explicitly prioritised as an integral component of how the field is configured and inevitably reconfigured in time to come. In the following section, I address one of the most contested yet influential theories and concepts in the study of religion and the media.

Mediatisation of religion

The mediatisation of religion theory is concerned with the changing authority of religion, in light of the mounting influence of media technology and subsequently media logic in contemporary societies. A key proponent of this theory, Stig Hjarvard suggests that, through processes of mediation – in this case understood as the process of becoming public via electronic, print or digital media – religion is subjected, at times willingly and at other times through circumstances

[22] Eickelmann, Dale and Jon Anderson. "Redefining Muslim publics" in *New media in the Muslim world: the emerging public sphere* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).

[23] Harri Englund, "Witchcraft and the Limits of Mass Mediation in Malawi," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13 (2) (2007): 295-311.; Maria Frahm-Arp, "Identity Issues amongst South African Pentecostal Charismatic Christians: Between Oreos and Romany Creams," *African Philosophy and the Future of Africa* 2 (14) (2011) 129-137.; Ilana, Van Wyk, *The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa: A Church of Strangers*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2015).

beyond its control, to the logics of the media.[24] He argues that religion, as institutions and systems of meaning making, are fundamentally altered through the process of mediatisation. The chief outcome of mediatisation according to Hjarvard is not a new kind of religion as such but rather a new social condition in which the power to define and practice religion has changed." It is self-evident that in this media-saturated age, media (both electronic and digital) can play a significant role in how religion is understood and experienced by any media consumer, regardless of their religious affiliation. Hjarvard's taxonomy of mediatised religion is helpful in making sense of the multiple ways in which religion and media intersect. Through differentiating the various genres within which religion and media can operate, it also provides a useful conceptual and material framework for approaching the densely saturated mediascape. Accordingly, Hjarvard distinguishes between "religious media, journalism on religion, and banal religion."[25] All three categories of mediatised religion are significant for understanding the complex ways in which gender is implicated in the grand narratives of mediatisation of religion. Religious media as a lens provides a spotlight on religious women's experiences with religious media, and can show how, through these interactions, they are able to gain access to formally exclusively male spaces. However, research shows how traditional forms of authority are able to re-inscribe traditional gender roles even in virtual environments.[26] The category presented by banal religion and media, focuses attention on the ways in which religion is made public through entertainment media, such as television series and films. Gender, like religion in this regard, is usually subjected to the commercial dimensions of this genre.[27]

In relation to the South African context where questions of harmful religious practices and the exploitation of women particularly at the hands of male religious leaders have dominated popular news sources, it is the category of journalism on religion that is in need of critical

[24] Stig Hjarvard, "Three forms of mediatized religion: changing the public face of religion," In *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives*, eds. Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövheim (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2012): 21-44.; Stig Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion," *Media, Culture and Society*, 38(1) (2016): 8-17.

[25] Hjarvard, "Three forms of mediatized religion: changing the public face of religion", 28.

[26] Michele Rosenthal, "Infertility, blessings, and head coverings: mediated practices of Jewish repentance," in *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges,* ed. Mia Lövheim, (New York: Routledge, 2013):111–124.

[27] Lövheim, Mia. "Mediatization: analysing transformations of religion from a gender perspective." *Media, Culture, and Society* 38(1) (2016): 18-27.

attention. In the Nordic context, Hjarvard[28] has shown that news media has often been primarily responsible for bringing religion to the political public sphere. In the section that follows I show that in the case of the rise of unorthodox and exploitative religious practices, the media, in framing the topic for newsworthiness, have; first, played a critical role in bringing the issue to the attention of the public and state authorities; and second, framed the gender implications of these "stories" as secondary to the more sensational and entertaining aspects of the religious leaders and to the economics of the exploitation.

Commercialisation of Religion and/or the Exploitation of Women

In 2014, Pastor Lesogo Daniels was thrust into the spotlight after video images of his congregants eating grass were posted via the Facebook Page of the Rabboni Center Ministries congregation. Reportedly a "miracle man", Pastor Lesogo was unapologetic about his unorthodox healing practices and members of his congregation attest to the efficacy of his methods. According to a news source:

> One woman, 21-year-old law student Rosemary Phetha claimed she suffered from a sore throat for an entire year. Once the young woman ingested the grass, she swore it healed her malady, telling Times Live, that the preacher "turned me into a sheep and instructed me to eat grass. Yes, we eat grass and we're proud of it because it demonstrates that, with God's power, we can do anything.[29]

The young pastor is also known for his entrepreneurial skills. He sells a variety of wares from bumper stickers to oils for anointing. In 2015, Pastor Penuel, of the End of Time Disciples Ministries, reportedly Daniels's understudy, made headlines for even more unorthodox ritual practices, including, feeding his congregants snakes, getting them to strip naked before praying for them and most notably encouraging them to drink petrol with the promise that it would transform into a popular soft drink.[30] In 2016, another young, charismatic black man, Pastor Mboro, founder of the aptly named Incredible Happenings Ministries, claimed that he was captured to heaven during the Easter Sunday Service.

[28] Hjarvard, "Three forms of mediatized religion: changing the public face of religion"

[29] Manual Logan, Ruth. 2014. South African Pastor Makes Congregation Eat Grass To Be Closer To God. https://newsone.com/2832419/pastor-lesego-daniel/ (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

[30] Nemakonde, Vhahangwele. 2015. Pastor Mnguni makes congregation eat snakes. https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/423976/pastor-mnguni-makes-congregation-eat-snakes (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

Incredibly, he managed to capture a few *selfies* while in the celestial realm. The pictures were not made publicly available but were available for purchase at R5000 per picture. Unfortunately, Pastor Mboro's sacred tool, his Samsung Galaxy Smartphone was stolen from his car a week later, and the evidence of his transcendence to the heavenly realm was forever lost. According to reports:

> One of Mboro's bodyguards claims the pictures were real and he has seen it with his own eyes. "The pictures were really there, I saw them. We suspect one of the boys washing the Prophet's car took the phone. But they all denied taking it, even after we beat them.[31]

Alleged physical violence aside and despite the loss of potential income from the sale of celestial selfies, "The Millionaire Preacher" is the picture of "new money" – he wears designer suits, is impeccably groomed, and drives a car worth almost 1.5 million South African rands. More recently, Mboro has been at the centre of controversy surrounding the death of a three year old child who was brought to the pastor by her mother, for prayer. During the service the child's condition took a turn for the worse, and paramedics were called to the scene. Allegedly, they took over 90 minutes to arrive during which time Mboro continued to pray for the child. What followed is unclear, although Mboro claims that the first responders refused to enter the church and help the child, others on the scene reported that the child was already dead when the paramedics arrived. Mboro has opened a case of culpable homicide against the emergency services. The child's mother made the following statement, "I was failed by the paramedics and the SAPS. The one man that tried to help me, Prophet Mboro, was unfairly targeted by certain journalists."[32]

The Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems Report

In response to the rise of reports about unorthodox religious practices, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities (hereafter referred to as the CRL) launched an investigative study into the "Commercialisation of

[31] Lee Francke, Robin. 2016. Prophet loses heave selfie phone. https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/prophet-loses-heaven-selfies-phone-2007111 (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

[32] Bornman, Jan. Mother 'broken' after taking her sick child to Pastor Mboro. https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/mother-broken-after-taking-her-sick-child-to-pastor-mboro-20180103 (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems" in South Africa. The objectives of the survey were listed as the following:

> i) investigate and understand further issues surrounding the commercialisation of religion and traditional healing, (ii) identify the causes underlying the commercialisation of religion and traditional healing, (iii) assess the extent of commercialisation of religion and traditional healing practices and how satisfied respondents are with government regulation and oversight, (iv) understand the deep societal thinking that makes some members of our society vulnerable and gullible with respect to views expressed and actions during religious ceremonies, (iv) assess the religious framework and its relevance to deal with the prevailing religious challenges, and (v) formulate recommendations that address the status quo with respect to commercialised religion and traditional healing.[33]

It is clear from the title of the report, and the objectives, that the commission was predominantly concerned with the financial business of these new churches. The methodology of the report cements this point since, although the report was commissioned by the CRL; it was actually conducted by the Bureau of Market Research, a research unit of the college of Economic and Management Studies at the University of South Africa. While the fourth objective alludes to the commission's plan to try to understand the ways in which religious believers are implicated within this broader framework of commercialisation, what is of concern is that what can be considered the most important objectives of the study, particularly in light of the concerning practices revealed by the media has not been highlighted as its driving force.

The report claims to have consulted 905 respondents, which include, "religious leaders, congregants, heads of household, congregants and traditional healing practitioners and followers" and 37 members of non-religious/spiritualist institutions, and 6 key informants. Suffice to say, gender or even rudimentary sex differentiation are never raised or considered as critical to discussing the ways in which power – that of the spiritual, authoritarian, and overwhelming male persuasion – is negotiated within the context of these institutions. As far as is verifiable, based on the names of the 85 religious institutions that were summoned by the commission to public hearings, only a handful of institutions were represented by women. It appears as though women were conceptually

[33] CRL Prelim Report. The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities: Prelimanary Report on the hearings: Commercialization of Religion in South Africa. Pretoria, 2017.

and physically (through their lack of presence in institutional representation) excluded in the conceptualisation and the research practices of the CRL study.

Many of the media reports focussed on the sensational nature of the religious leaders. The prophets, the priests and the pastors were presented as *nouveau riche* caricatures and zealous evangelicals that any "reasonable" person would scoff at. When the media did divert its attention away from the "leading men," the followers, who were represented almost entirely by women, were overwhelming portrayed as desperately in need of financial or health-related saving. These women were presented as zealously devoted to their spiritual guru, typifying the "vulnerable" and "gullible" persons to whom the report refers in passing.

In this case study which illustrates the rise of unorthodox and exploitative religious practices, women have been failed three times. First, by the media that have trivialised their stories in pursuit of more entertaining and sensationalist narratives around "holy" men doing outrageous things; second, by the report that chose to "follow the money" and ignore the specificity of women's experiences as integral to understanding the inner logic of what drives support for these organisations and their leaders; and finally; gender and the experiences of women, both from within and without the problematised religious groups, have been ignored in the formulations of religious regulations that the CRL have proposed as "protective" mechanisms. It is tenable that driven by commercial concerns and framed by media logics of aesthetics and genre, the information that the media reports have provided on the topic have not acknowledged the complicated ways in which gender is implicated. However, it is untenable that the CRL which is constitutionally mandated to protect religious communities have failed to address the very serious ways in which women have been at the receiving end of potentially exploitative, religiously sanctioned practices and further marginalised from the state-authorised processes of deliberation that have the potential to fundamentally reconfigure their religious environments.

This brings to the fore the question underlying this discussion of gender's absence in: media reporting on religion; the CRL report; and the field of religion, culture and media studies. How should feminist scholars working at the intersections of religion, media, and cultural and religious studies negotiate the sexualisation and racialisation of African bodies within parallel constructions of sexual violence and Afro-pessimism?

Knowledge is discursively, materially, and continually produced and reproduced.

Feminist scholars have long demonstrated that knowledge is defined by its situatedness and produced through personal, social, and historical circumstances and experiences. In order to read beyond narratives of black African women as spiritual and sexual victims, I suggest an approach that is inherently post-structuralist, to focus on how gender is constructed through and in media and not merely found as reflection.[34] Therefore, in this context, we cannot be distracted with analysing the stereotypical images of weak women that have been circulated within this story, although this does indeed warrant attention. A focus on the experience of women also requires scrutiny of the possibilities and limitations of individual agency in its many variances. I suggest that through considering the mediatisation of gender as part of the process of religion's mediatisation we are better able to assess the conditions, (medialogical, societal, and religious) under which particular symbolisations of gender are produced and presented and to discern which discourses and formations of power and authorities are served and undermined in this process.

Conclusion

Although other religions were compelled to participate in the proceedings, the CRL study was essentially commissioned in direct response to the activities of a handful of young, black, Christian religious leaders. Beyond the legal ramifications of criminal activities and given the diversity of Christianity, the question of who decides what is acceptable and unacceptable Christian leadership and religious practice becomes crucial for confronting the Afro-pessimism that has characterised the media stories and the investigative framework of the CRL. This is not only an ecumenical and ecclesial question, but also more importantly a question of power and authority, especially in relation the politics of race and the power to define religion. Despite claims to religious equality in the context of South Africa; Western European Christian and post enlightenment sensibilities of what religion is, its place in society and what it ought to look like; are the very foundations upon which the constitutional right to religious freedom is enshrined and articulated. Therefore, in determining the intersections of power at play, the CRL report, and response to the cases of Mboro et al, can be read as a blatant attempt to quell any ostensibly unauthorised religious practice that might bring disrepute to Christianity.

[34] Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

The media reporting and the CRL in response to the rise of unorthodox and exploitative religious practices have not treated the charismatic black pastors at the centre of these controversies, as *bona-fide*, religious leaders. Consequently, their female constituencies have dominantly been regarded as gullible victims of fraudsters and not as sincere religious believers. Consequently their stories have been side-lined. An intersectional feminist analysis of this case study reveals that, by following the spectacle of performance and the trail of money, and by ignoring the women's experiences, both the media and CRL have undermined the religious legitimacy of these organisations, their leaders, and followers, implicitly upholding so called acceptable forms of Christianity, while at the same time failing the women who have been multifariously violated.

Bibliography

Baderoon, Gabeba. *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014.

CRL Pilot Report. *The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities: Pilot Report Commercialization of Religion in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2016.

CRL Prelim Report. *The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities: Prelimanary Report on the hearings: Commercialization of Religion in South Africa*. Pretoria, 2017.

CRL Final Report. *The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities: Final Report on the hearings: Commercialization of Religion in South Africa*. Pretoria, 2017

De Vries, Hent, ed. *Religion: Beyond a Concept*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

Eickelmann, Dale and Jon Anderson. "Redefining Muslim publics" in *New media in the Muslim world: the emerging public sphere* edited by Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, 12. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Eisenlohr, Patrick. “Media and Religious Diversity.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41(2012): 37-55.

Eisenlohr, Patrick. “Reconsidering mediatisation of religion: Islamic televangelism in India.” *Media, Culture and Society* 39(6) (2017): 869-884.

Engelke, Mathew. “Religion and the Media Turn.” *American Ethnologist* 37 (2) (2010): 371-379.

Englund, Harri. “Witchcraft and the Limits of Mass Mediation in Malawi.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13 (2) (2007): 295-311.

Frahm-Arp, Maria. “Identity Issues amongst South African Pentecostal Charismatic Christians: Between Oreos and Romany Creams.” *African Philosophy and the Future of Africa* 2 (14) (2011) 129-137.

Gill, Rosalind. *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

Hackett, Rosalind. “Review: A New Axial Moment for the Study of Religion?” *Temenos* 42 (2) (2006b): 93-111.

Hackett, Rosalind. “Examining the Nexus of Religion, Conflict and Media in Africa.” *African Communication Research* 2 (1) (2009): 117-130.

Hackett, Rosalind. “Regulating Religious Freedom in Africa.” *Emory International Law Review* 25 (2011): 853-879.

Hackett, Rosalind and Benjamin Soares. “Introduction: New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa” In *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*, edited by Rosalind Hackett and Benjamin Soares, 1-16. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hjarvard, Stig. “The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media, and Social Change.” *Culture and Religion* 12 (2) (2011): 119-135.

Hjarvard, Stig. “Three forms of mediatized religion: changing the public face of religion” In *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* edited by Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövheim, 21-44. Göteborg: Nordicom, 2012.

Hjarvard, Stig and Mia Lövheim., eds. *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives*. Göteborg: Nordicom, 2012.

Hjarvard, Stig. “Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion.” *Media, Culture and Society* 38(1) (2016): 8-17.

Hoover, Stewart and Lynn Schofield Clark., eds. *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Hoover, Stewart and Knut Lundby., eds. *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997.

Haron, Muhammed. “Religion and the Media: Reflections on Their Position and Relationship in Southern Africa.” *Global Media Journal: African Edition* 4 (1) (2010): 28-50.

Lövheim, Mia and Gordon Lynch., eds. “The Mediatization of Religion Debate.” *Culture and Religion* 12 (2) (2011): 111-117.

Lövheim, Mia, ed. *Media, Religion, and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*. Routledge: New York, 2013.

Lövheim, Mia. “Mediatization: analysing transformations of religion from a gender perspective.” *Media, Culture, and Society* 38(1) (2016): 18-27.

Meyer, Birgit and Annelies Moors, eds. *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Morgan, David, ed. *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture.* London: Routledge, 2008.

Morgan, David. “Mediation or Mediatisation: The History of Media in the Study of Religion.” *Culture and Religion* 12 (2) (2011): 137-152.

Morgan, David. “Religion and Media: A Critical Review of Recent Developments.” *Critical Research on Religion* 1 (3) (2013): 347-356.

Rosenthal, Michele. “Infertility, blessings, and head coverings: mediated practices of Jewish repentance” In: *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges* edited Mia Lövheim, 111–124. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Stolow, Jeremy, ed. *Deus in Machina: Religion Technology and the Things in Between*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013

Smith. Joyce. *Occupying Pews, Missing in the News: Women, Religion and Journalism in Media, Religion, and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Van Wyk, Ilana. *The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa: A Church of Strangers*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2015

Media Sources

Bornman, Jan. Mother ‘broken' after taking her sick child to Pastor Mboro. https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/mother-broken-after-taking-her-sick-child-to-pastor-mboro-20180103 (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

Freedom of Religion South Africa. 2015. Constitutional Court Shuts the Door on Ecclesia De Lange. https://forsa.org.za/tag/ecclesia-de-lange/ (Accessed 25 March, 2018).

Lee Francke, Robin. 2016. Prophet loses heave selfie phone. https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/prophet-loses-heaven-selfies-phone-2007111 (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

Manual Logan, Ruth. 2014. South African Pastor Makes Congregation Eat Grass To Be Closer To God. https://newsone.com/2832419/pastor-lesego-daniel/ (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

Nemakonde, Vhahangwele. 2015. Pastor Mnguni makes congregation eat snakes. https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/423976/pastor-mnguni-makes-congregation-eat-snakes (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

Sonke News. 2013. Update on Sonke's Complaint against Pastor 'Mboro' in 2011. http://genderjustice.org.za/news-item/update-on-sonke-s-complaint-against-pastor-mboro-in-2011/ (Accessed 28 March, 2018)

TimesLive. 2016. Pastor Mboro. *When a Prophet takes the biscuit.* https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2016-04-14-pastor-mboro---when-a-prophet-takes-the-biscuit/ (Accessed 28 March, 2018)

Unknown author. 2016. Pastor went to heaven and took pics to prove it. https://www.enca.com/south-africa/pastor-went-heaven-and-took-pics-prove-it (Accessed 28 March, 2018).

164-166 Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa *Vol. 23 No 2 (Dec. 2017)*

Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-Apartheid by Gabeba Baderoon (Review) [1]

Tammy Wilks
University of Cape Town

Regarding Muslims: Slavery to Post-apartheid is a timely book. It sits comfortably not only as a postcolonial analysis, but also as a methodological guide for postcolonial feminist research. The book helps postcolonial African feminist scholars to reconfigure the conceptual and visual habits used to define and represent Muslims and Islam, both historically and contemporarily. Gabeba Baderoon's ambition to use alternative materials to "speak back to the history of infantilising, quietist and picturesque images of Muslims", is exemplary and refreshing.[2] It charges the book with reflexivity, without running the risk of romanticising or essentialising Islam or Muslims. The book is structured into six chapters, each adding texture and nuance to historically flat representations of Muslim subjects. Thematic foci – representation, food, movement, sexual and labour histories, violence, and post-apartheid identity – respectively characterise the chapters, but these chapters are held together methodologically and theoretically. Each chapter turns the gaze, as it were, to accustomed ideas of what Muslims are – "coloured", or "Malay" – with alternative, but familiar sources – giving the book coherence and consistency.

Arguably, 'Ambiguous Visibility' is the most revelatory chapter in providing protocols and methodologies for postcolonial feminist research. The chapter is important for its introduction of the oblique gaze – a strategy Baderoon employs to view the visual art wherein Muslims are represented. Oblique gaze is an active exercise of looking "at an angle" that cuts through the conformity with which black bodies are designated, and in so doing, (re)surfaces personhood which is often overlooked. This interventionist move is carried throughout the book, yet 'Ambiguous Visibility' foregrounds a suspicion of archival material that will become a consistent practice in the following chapters. Staying with 'Ambiguous Visibility', Baderoon shows that because the archive categorises and catalogues institutions, ideas, place and people in separate holdings, it inherently belies a possibility to be read as an interrelated body of work.

[1] Gabeba Baderoon, *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014).

[2] Baderoon, *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid*. 4

As such, the very intimacy and interiority required to analyse Muslims and Islam as anything but "submissive and compliant," is therefore unavailable. [3] Baderoon does not stop with just an incisive critique of the limitations of the archive. She engages the archival limitations with alternative and unexpected sources that not only decentre the archive from its echelons, but also regard it as a translation of the multiple epistemologies wherein Muslims are represented.

Baderoon's approach is firmly grounded in the granular novelties of adding voice, resurfacing presence, and recalling personal memory that thankfully escapes the abstraction postcolonial scholars normally rely on when illustrating how the archive functions as only a "technology of the empire."[4] Baderoon achieves this by integrating "alternate archives," while her creative and contrapuntal method reveal the mutually constitutive power relations at work between subject and coloniser. By defining and representing Muslims and Islam as a discursive strategy to "secure a white subjectivity", Baderoon reveals how colonial personhood was constitutively defined.[5] One interesting way she achieves this is by revealing the anxieties and fragile imaginaries of colonists about "the landscape and the communities established by runaway slaves, rebellious labourers and insurrectionary groups".[6] In showing the strategies that colonists used to visually and conceptually tame Muslims, Baderoon also unsettles the steadiness of the colonial sensibilities. The chapter, as well as the book overall, is thus always layering the variety of ways in which power functions are entangled between disciplining the visibility of Muslims through sexuality and labour, whilst ensuring a degree of presence that reinforces a dominant representation of colonists.

Another useful contribution is the way Baderoon carefully presents the upsetting and uncomfortable histories alongside the poetic and reconciliatory. In the chapter 'Sexual Geographies of the Cape', the book demonstrates how various art forms – poetry, novels, and plays – redress the legacies of sexual violence and enslavement that, she argues, affects "all South Africans, not only the dependents of enslaved people."[7] By highlighting the emotive and celebratory features in art and performance art, the book softens the coarseness of the violence sexual histories that at once denies itself to "confine themselves solely to the

[3] Baderoon, Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid. 40

[4] Lisa Lowe, The Intimacies of Four Continents. (Duke University Press, 2015).

[5] Baderoon, Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid. 45

[6] Baderoon, Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid. 43

[7] Baderoon, Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid. 86

themes of suffering," but establishes itself nonetheless as a worthy epistemology.[8] This method becomes particularly important for African feminist postgraduate research as a *praxis* of oblique gaze – of "looking back" at the histories and the representations without replicating a gaze of shame or disgrace.

Perhaps a shortcoming of the book is its struggle to immediately attract a black reader whose research may focus on "reclaiming alternative modes of visibility for black subjectivity," yet could ignore the book based on its focus of Muslims and Islam.[9] When discussing the significance of *Regarding Muslims* for the study of African Traditional Religions (ATRs), Honours' and Masters' students confessed that the book presented as a private read of Muslim identity. In a decolonial configuration where the academic cannon is critiqued for excluding black epistemologies and histories, it can be argued that anticipating the content of *Regarding Muslims* 'by its cover' signals an urgent call for convenors and lecturers working in the intersections of religion, gender, and feminism in Africa, to include reading materials and pedagogies that disrupt a conventional cannon and teaching praxis. *Regarding Muslims* remains grossly unpresented in the prescribed reading lists of Religious Studies course, especially when the thematic focus is not a close study of Muslims or Islam. Courses that specialise in ATRs tend to shy away from an engagement with Islam, and bracket it as ontologically and temporally conditioned to Africa. Introducing *Regarding Muslims* to a Religious Studies' class could encourage students to seek out, and innovatively incorporate, literature that does not immediately represent their research focus. By demonstrating to students, the elegant way in which Baderoon interweaves the personal and the political natures of her research, the classroom could be transformed into a space where students share their lived experience and use this epistemology to critique the theories and methods of Religious Studies. Four years since its publication, *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid* remains, not only, a revelatory postcolonial text, but a teaching praxis as well.

Bibliography

Baderoon, G. *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid.* Wits University Press, 2014.

Lowe, L. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Duke University Press, 2015.

[8] Baderoon, Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid. 106

[9] Baderoon, Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid. 39