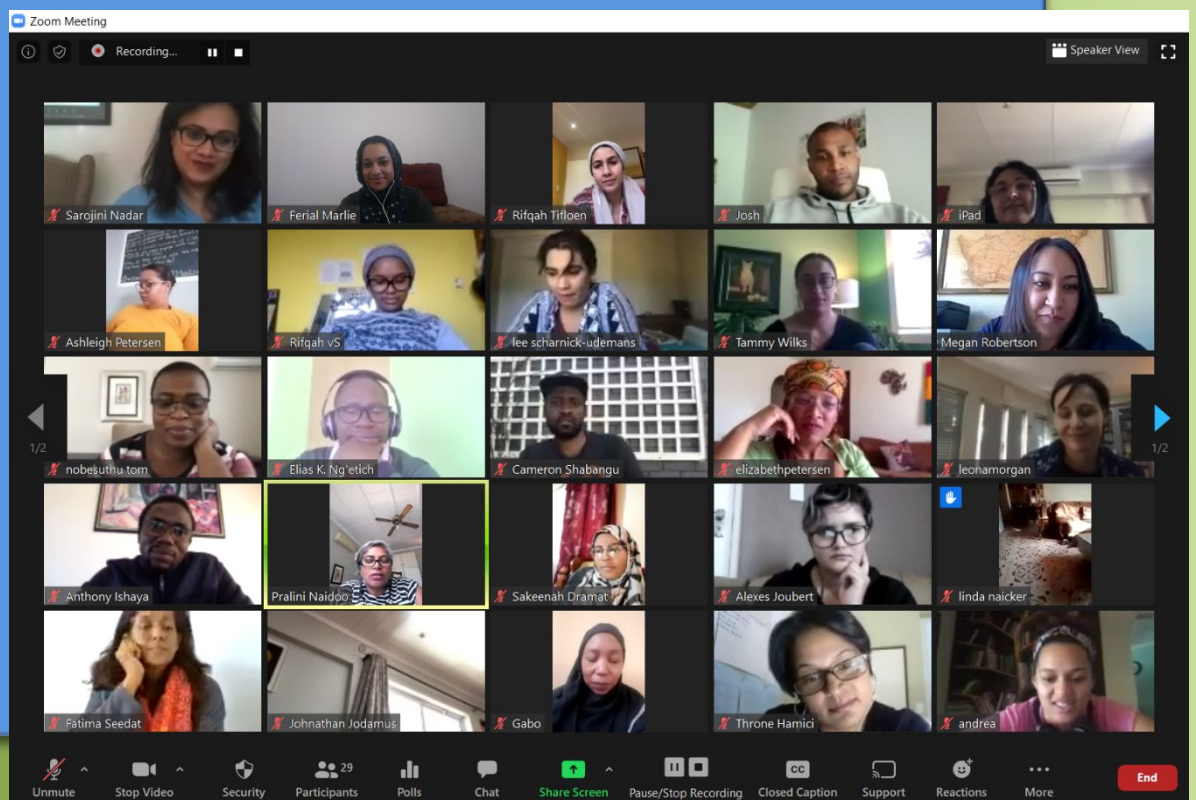




# Annual Report

## 2020



Reporting period:  
March 2020 – March 2021

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## Vision and Objectives

The vision of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice is to promote transdisciplinary research engagement that focuses on the critical intersections between Religion and Social Justice through:

- ≈ *Facilitating ongoing debate and critical discourse on the intersections of Religion and Social Justice through conferences, workshops, seminars and other collaborations with civil society*
- ≈ *Engendering activist collaboration between academia and civil society*
- ≈ *Developing resources such as research and graduate fellowships for the transdisciplinary study of Religion and Social Justice*
- ≈ *Publishing and disseminating the findings of research conducted within the Centre*

# Thematic focus areas

## Religion and Gender

Through this thematic focus area, the Centre seeks to foster critical research and civic engagement, which actively challenge the intersecting and systemic powers that produce and maintain the marginalisation and oppression of those who identify as female and queer. Projects within this thematic focus will draw on the variety of resources available within feminist, queer and masculinity studies to develop knowledge and just-action in the complex and diverse areas where religion and gender intersect. These include, but are not limited to: sexual reproductive health, violence against women, sexuality, queer identity, women and leadership, and religious and cultural laws and traditions.

## Religion and the Environment

This thematic focus area foregrounds the role of religion in the pursuit of “justice for the earth”. The religion and ecology research focus area critically engages the connections between anthropocentric and androcentric discourses and practices and examines the ways that religion and the environment are connected with culture, economy, politics, community, heritage, and indigenous knowledge systems. Research in this area explores the position of religions and cultures in determining and contesting commonly accepted norms that constitute the relationships between and among all living beings.

## Religion and Education

Given the decolonial fervour sweeping through the academy, the study of religion is undergoing a paradigmatic shift that scholarship from South Africa is poised to lead. Critically reflecting on pedagogical praxis is a key task in this context – and so we focus on both transforming the content and the processes required for more decolonial, feminist and queer pedagogies. Furthermore, in this theme, we conceptualise the postgraduate training workshops and supervision, offered within the Centre as a step towards “educational justice.” The postgraduate training programme is a project in the decolonisation and democratisation of education. Through focused thematic weekend workshops the process of academic writing is demystified and students are given the necessary support they need to navigate the research process.

## Religion and the Economy

South Africa is regarded as one of the most unequal countries in the world, with growing statistics of income inequality, and the persistence of poverty. Economic justice is linked to moral principles which support the possibilities for people to live dignified material lives rooted in creativity and productivity. This thematic focus area seeks to interrogate the ways in which religion is implicated in the institutionalization of economic oppression and examines the resources available within religion to destabilise prevailing imbalances of economic power. Furthermore, the ways in which gender, race and ethnicity intersect with the economy of the sacred are explored.

## Religion and Politics

With this thematic area, the Centre encourages research, conversations and partnerships that challenge the taken for granted nature of concepts and configurations such as democracy, equality, justice, reconciliation, and human rights in the social sciences and society. In light of the role of religion in general and Christianity in particular, in both the colonial and apartheid projects, the Centre is dedicated to exploring the possibilities for social justice through scholarship that engages religion as a critical concept and as a central component of human existence. This is demonstrated through our commitment to providing teaching and research that prioritises giving voice and visibility to religious traditions, and aspects of religious experiences that have hitherto been marginalized in the academy.

# Foreword

*Sarojini Nadar*

We have been living with the COVID-19 pandemic for almost a full year, and the tragedies



Sarojini Nadar

and emotional upheaval of 2020 is still fresh in our hearts and minds. Apart from the pandemic, 2020 began with a great degree of sadness and devastation, when on 12 March 2020, one of our postdoc scholars, Alease Brown, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. Alease and I were busy with guest editing a special volume of essays for a journal, in honour of the late Katie Geneva Cannon, a trailblazer within the theology discipline. Alas, while occupied with the first round of editing the submissions for this volume, Alease passed away after a very short stay in the hospital. She sent the papers she was working on to me, on 9 March, and she passed away just three days later. When we met with the team of staff and students on the Monday following her death we were, for the most part of the meeting, just paralyzed with grief, unable to move into a mechanical mode of planning a memorial for her while shutting down

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*"I called deep  
on my courage  
again"*

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classes and life as we knew it. Instead, we all just spoke movingly of when we last saw Alease, and what she meant to us. We shared her last emails and texts with each other and Nobesuthu Tom, one of our Masters students (probably the last of us to see Alease alive), reassured us that when she saw Alease, she did not look like someone who was leaving us. She was cheerful and full of good spirits, just the way we knew her. We drew great comfort from this and it paved the way for us to share some lighter moments about Alease's quirks and her great sense of humour. At the end, acknowledging that our communal ways of grieving were unsafe in this time, we accepted the impossibility of hosting a memorial service and instead opted to make a video memorial tribute to Alease. The online tribute can be accessed [here](#), (and the tribute written by Nobesuthu Tom, can be accessed immediately after the foreword in this report).

Two weeks later, on 26 March 2020, the first day of the national lockdown, I called deep on my courage again, and with a heavy heart, fearful of the impending calamity, tried to give direction to colleagues, administrative staff and postgraduate students in the Centre. I reminded them that the COVID pandemic brings into sharp focus, the gaping inequalities in our lives. In wishing them strength for the unknown journey that lay ahead of us in the months to come, I told them that:

- 1) We will continue to work with courage and compassion
- 2) We will continue to work remotely with due consideration to the emotional upheaval that some experience in these moments of isolation.
- 3) We will step up to the plate when others cannot, with full knowledge that they will step up to the plate for us when we cannot
- 4) We will work with common purpose and vision towards each of our tasks, and work with the principles of reciprocity, fairness and equity in mind.



A few months later in August 2020, our senior researcher, Lee Scharnick-Udemans contracted COVID, followed by Megan Robertson, our postdoc scholar, in late November. In the middle of December, I also contracted the virus and am still struggling with a condition that I developed as a result. The deep emotional and physical upheaval of 2020 notwithstanding, the responsibilities we each had in the Centre were met, largely because of the commitments we had made in March, to support one another within the strong intersectional feminist working paradigm that we had been developing and nurturing since 2017.

We are enormously pleased with what we were able to achieve, despite the devastating challenges we had to face in 2020. Lee Scharnick-Udemans notes: “Given the on-going status of the pandemic, controversy surrounding the acquisition and distribution of a vaccine, the effects of the economic fall-out on the livelihoods of millions of South Africans, the pre-emptive, protective restrictions regarding social activities which preclude the possibilities of collective grieving at a time when death is a constant companion, and the sustained intensity of the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence, the productivity and successes of the Centre and the Faculty, and of staff and students are bittersweet.”

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*“Given the on-going status of the pandemic... the productivity and successes of the Centre are bittersweet”* Lee Scharnick-Udemans, Senior Researcher

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And yet, we must contemplate and consider these, because out of this reflection our resilience is not just acknowledged, but encouraged and celebrated. The Centre worked hard to transform our work from very embodied spaces into online and virtual spaces. We managed to do much of this with some measure of success, but we do not wish to gloss over the challenges of what it means to work in this way. Notwithstanding, I am pleased to report on the following highlights from our team:

- Lee Scharnick-Udemans, Senior Researcher, was accepted as a cohort member for the “Sacred Writes’ 2021 Public Scholarship Training Session.” This programme is hosted by North Eastern University in the United States and funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. This was a remarkable achievement as the organisers note that they received 162 applications for what was scheduled to be 6 open slots! She was also chosen as one of two Faculty nominees for the DHET Future Professor’s Programme. In addition, she completed her probation with an excellent teaching portfolio that received great acclaim from the Faculty reviewers.
- Megan Robertson, postdoc scholar, had her first international peer reviewed journal article published in 2020. Robertson, M. 2020. Queer Studies and Religion in Southern Africa: The Production of Queer Christian Subjects. *Religion Compass*, 15 (1): 1 - 12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12385>. Religion Compass is listed on the Scopus database. This is a great achievement as it came hot on the heels of her newly awarded PhD in April 2020. As a Centre, we emphasise that we must weigh publications, in addition to counting. While the South African incentive system for publications tend to focus on the latter, we are committed to the former as a measure of genuine scholarly contribution. One

of the peer reviewers captures the distinctive merit of Megan's article, and her original contribution to knowledge in language of great praise in their report:

*The author successfully makes the material eminently accessible and still manages to probe the blind spots and possibilities in the field. I am jealous of the author's ability to be comprehensive yet not overwhelming. The writing is clear and crisp. And I deeply appreciate the way the article shapes the contours of the field toward the conclusion, which rightly demonstrates the work still to be done. I cannot more highly recommend this article." Indeed this is the kind of scholarly excellence we are trying to encourage and nurture in the Centre.*

- Ferial Marlie, administrator, registered for a degree in our Faculty in 2020. Despite the disruptions and working from home with two young children, Ferial managed to bag distinctions in all four of her courses: Anthropology & Sociology; English; Ethics, and Geography, and emerged with a total average of 78,87% for her first year! She managed this, while still fulfilling and exceeding all the expectations for her duties as an administrator in the Centre.

The above achievements signal the hard work and dedication of our very small team. It is an indication that we have the strength and courage to work under very challenging circumstances.

The other highlight of 2020, was that we were still able to hold onto our commitments to create platforms for scholarly engagement while ensuring our scholarship holds social relevance. The aim of both the Chair and the Centre, is to encourage and develop both textual and empirical research that analyses the relationship between the lived beliefs and experiences of religion, and actions for social justice. The opportunity to interrogate the links between belief systems and gender-based violence, presented itself again when on 17 June 2020, the State President made one of his regular COVID-19 addresses to the nation. We had come to expect these addresses to be sombre in detailing the scale of the escalating pandemic in the country. This address was even more grave, because added to his regular updates on the pandemic, the president called on the nation to acknowledge gender-based violence as a second pandemic

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*"It is with the heaviest of hearts that I stand before the women and girls of South Africa this evening to talk about another pandemic that is raging in our country – the killing of women and children by the men of our country...At a time when the pandemic has left us all feeling vulnerable and uncertain, violence is being unleashed on women and children with a brutality that defies comprehension."*

President Cyril Ramaphosa, Covid-19 Address, 17 June 2020

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in the country – one as serious, or if not more serious than the coronavirus. Adopting a tone even more grave than his usual pandemic address tone, he stated:

The President's strong statements about GBV being a second pandemic, and his assertion that the brutality defies comprehension strengthened our resolve to continue to host the annual lecture we have been hosting since 2017, commemorating what is now known as "women's month" in South Africa. (We were hesitant to take what was for the past four years a very embodied and robust dialogue onto an online platform). In these past four years of hosting



these annual lectures we have called attention to the “economies of violence” which sustain the brutality that the President said, defies comprehension. Many people do indeed struggle to comprehend how, in a country with arguably a most progressive Constitution regarding gender equity, we still have one of the highest rates of gender-based-violence. Through these public lectures we have sought to disabuse the public of the popular notion that legislation is enough. The President’s reminder that in the first few weeks of lockdown alone there were over 2000 cases of GBV reported and that the few weeks preceding his address no fewer than 21 women were murdered, underscored our analysis. His words were a stark reminder that even the most progressive legislative change and policies are not enough to ensure women’s safety because “women are dying with protection orders in their handbags,” as one writer observed. Feminist scholars of religion have convincingly shown that laws and policies do not function independently of the religious and cultural values that people hold about gendered norms – interrogating religious and cultural belief systems about gender is therefore as critical in gender-based violence interventions, as making laws and policies about it.

Buttressed by the increased visibility of violence during the pandemic we decided to go ahead and host the annual lecture online with Rev Dr Traci West, Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Drew University, on 31 August 2020. The lecture began with a slide show rolling news-report after news-report of the gender-based violence of the past year. This set the scene for West’s interrogation of what she called the “moral economies” which sustain violence. She persuasively argued that religion grants *moral permission* for the violence, and then offers *moral impunity* to perpetrators. She bravely called out the hypocrisies of religious leaders who speak with forked tongues about racial justice, while promoting misogyny and queer-phobia through their teachings. In my response to West’s lecture, I highlighted three specific points which were of particular value to us in the South African context:

1. **Disruptiveness** – In her lecture West laid out “disruptiveness” as the main paradigm for ending violence. This was important particularly for our students who often focus in their research, on the ways in which economies of violence displace and disempower women. The response of the South African government too, especially during Women’s Month is to point out that women are powerless, and therefore somehow need special protection. The call to disrupt narratives of powerlessness as a means for moral action was therefore deeply significant in a context where the moral economies found within religion, which sustain violence, remain largely intact; while women’s so-called powerlessness is taken for granted. A disruption of that narrative is crucial for us in the South African context.
2. **Crisis Intervention** – The second point of West’s lecture that stood out for me is the problem of engaging with violence as crisis intervention. This method of addressing gender-based violence is very popular especially in religious communities who are happy to do crisis intervention through collections for building women’s abuse shelters or setting up GBV helplines. This seems to be the “safe” method, particularly for churches who even set up commissions to investigate cases of abuse, without disrupting the deeply held beliefs that sustain the violence.
3. **Survivor/Victim Paradox** – Finally, as one of our Masters students noted, she was deeply grateful for how the lecture pointed out the paradox of the strength of black women – how we glorify black women’s strength in the face of adversity. There is a fundamental problem with glorifying survivor-hood – and condemning victimhood as mutually exclusive options for black women – between seeing them as super strong with a great deal of agency or super submissive with no agency, as West put it. I would argue that we may very well need

to get to the point of seeing the strength of black women as simply strength in its own right. As a woman said of the portrayal of Black women in the Black Panther movie “They weren’t strong because they were angry, they weren’t strong because they were hurt, they were strong because they were strong! “

Overall, notwithstanding the limitations of online spaces, this lecture fitted perfectly well within the tradition of the annual lecture that seeks to expose those moral economies that need dismantling and disrupting, and indeed was one of the highlights of 2020 for the Centre.

As already noted, while these are praiseworthy achievements which we celebrate, we also acknowledge our collective fragility and vulnerability that the pandemic has laid bare, and so we look forward to 2021, with a sense of hope that the pandemic opened up a portal to embrace vulnerability and fragility, as part of our humanness.

As Arundhati Roy so eruditely notes, “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

We are enormously grateful that the work that we do in the Centre provides us with ample opportunities to fight for such a world through scholarship that is at once intellectual, creative and proudly social-justice oriented.

Sarojini Nadar

Director

March 2021

## Death and Mourning During a Pandemic – the Passing of Alease

**Brown**<sup>1</sup> by Nobesuthu Tom

In the last stanza of Maya Angelou's poignant poem, "When Great Trees Fall," is the line "And when great souls die, after a period, peace blooms." While the length of the period one has to



Alease Brown

wait for such peace is uncertain, the hope that the peace will come is ever present. This hope is largely possible through the rituals and customs of mourning, each important in its own way, as a step in the journey of grieving. As we wander through this journey of grief, we are able to accept the reality of the death and are able to call on the memories of the person whom we loved, to inspire us as we who are alive resume our own searching for meaning in life.

With the pandemic of COVID-19, this journey of grief that we should have embarked on for our dear friend and sister, Alease Brown, was not possible. We were denied mourning. At the time of her death, Alease Brown was coordinator of the Southern African Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and post-doctoral fellow at the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice, based at the University of the Western Cape. This reflective piece seeks to map out the series of events around her death, and considers the

impact of the lockdown on burial and mourning. We document her narrative as stories are part of the human experience. They not only record a series of events, but capture memories associated with those events. At times such as this, the memories are very painful, yet healing comes in capturing them, and as one keeps visiting and revisiting the story, the pain eases. And so, it is with Alease, that as we try to cope with her death and move on, we wish for her memory never to fade into nothing.

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<sup>1</sup> This tribute will be published in the forthcoming book "A Time Like No Other: COVID-19 in Women's Voices" edited by Nobesuthu Tom, Nontando Hadebe, Sue Rakoczy, and Daniela Gennrich. The book is a collaboration between the gender and religion thematic focus area of the SARCHI Chair in Religion and Social Justice and the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians.

Although Alease did not die of COVID-19, she died a week before the President declared the national lockdown. With borders closing soon after, Alease's body could not be flown back to the United States, her home country. And so, with no body to bury, both her South African family of friends and colleagues, and her biological family in the US, hung in limbo, unable to say, 'Rest in peace' and reach closure to this tragic event.

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*"And when great souls die, after a period, peace blooms." May Angelou, When Great Trees Fall*

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She was a beautiful mystery, with a naughty smile and a twinkle in her eye. When she spoke, imparting insight and wisdom, her voice sounded like she was perpetually on the verge of a big laugh.

Alease had come to us, the community of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice (the Centre) through our Director, Professor Sarojini Nadar, to serve her post-doctoral fellowship. The first time we met her was at the postgraduate cohort supervision workshop in April 2019. An American among Africans, she brought a different perspective to our discussions as we tried to find and articulate our research focus areas. As she asked, "Why is that so?" or "What do you mean by that?" it dawned on me that we perhaps take much for granted as Africans on matters relating to Africa and African identity. In the African American she was, she brought a fresh lens to how we look at our continent, our issues, and the way we engage with social justice in academia.



*Pictured far left: Alease Brown in Botswana.*

Clearly not one to shy away from a challenge, Alease jumped at the opportunity to represent the Desmond Tutu Centre at a Pan-African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) held in Botswana, in July 2019. Considering her leadership acumen, and her commitment to mentorship, it was not surprising that she was unanimously elected as the regional coordinator for Southern Africa at this meeting.

"Alease has big plans for the Circle." Prof Nadar told me. "It is surprising to note, that while the issue of race is implicit in the Circle's research and writing, with a few exceptions, race has never featured as a critical feature in our work. Alease and I have both been pondering why this is so. She wants to put race as a variable of analysis, firmly back on the Circle agenda."

I smiled. I was beginning to like this Alease. Reviewing much of the Circle literature for my Honours and then my Masters, I too was surprised by this strange gap in much of the work of the Circle. It seemed that the work of Musa Dube, Madipoane Masenya and others from the Southern African Circle who had begun this critical race work needed expansion, and who better than Alease whose PhD had focussed on the intersections of religion and Black protest, to lead the way? I felt Alease couldn't have come at a better time, as discourses of white privilege and normativity were gaining public and scholarly attention. It would only take time and a courageous soul, like Alease, to bring this issue to the table for the Circle to stare it in the eye.

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Always tactful to first chat and sense how you are, it was out of character for Prof Nadar to get to the point so quickly on a phone call.

*"Nobesuthu, I have some sad news to tell you," she said.*

My guard went up. I thought she was going to tell me that my sponsorship had not been approved for this academic year. It was the beginning of the year, after all.

*"I'm listening, Prof."*

*"It's Alease."*

*"Oh, ok?"*

*"She has passed on."*

*"How? That can't be. She was fine when I last saw her!"*

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You see, a couple of days before, my daughter and I had gone to Chris Barnard Hospital in the city to fetch Alease's keys to go switch off the stove she had left on when she had suddenly had to go to hospital. Yes, she had been in bed at the hospital but she was not looking sick. She had some discomfort but she was not in pain. My daughter even commented on how beautiful she was. To reconcile the news of Alease's death in the midst of the mental picture I had of a vibrant and upbeat (albeit a little ill) person at the hospital was a great challenge.

For several days after this announcement, the news of Alease's passing spread across the globe. Facebook was awash with pictures and memories shared by Alease's friends all over the world. Within the Centre, shock rippled across our WhatsApp groups, as more of our associates heard the news. Messages from the postgraduate cohort of students poured in:

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*"May her Creator be pleased with her. May she be pleased with her Creator."*

Fatima Seedat

*"May her radiant smile light her path to the ancestral realms."*

Sarojini Nadar

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Offers of help and support came in from the two PhD candidates living and working in the US.

It was in the midst of all this pain and shock that the team at The Centre gathered on the Monday after her passing for a communal pause to collectively acknowledge this painful loss, and to plan how we could provide a space to mourn, by way of a memorial service, for Alease's South African colleagues and friends. Her former colleagues at Stellenbosch University and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa church who were in town were also keen on this idea.

Leading the pause, Prof Nadar read us some text messages she and Alease had exchanged about a project they were working on together.

*"I keep asking myself, what did I miss?" she cried as she read the texts.*

*"There's nothing there, Prof. Everything sounds like she was ok, not that sick." Every one tried to bring reassurance; Sonwabile tried to comfort her.*

*"Eish, this is a problem. Alease was also on a journey to discern her calling. This is such a loss." Rhine, tutor on Alease and Megan's course, and lay minister in the Anglican Church, mourned.*

*"She was not even planning to stay the night in hospital. She had left a pot on the stove. She even had her laptop bag with her," I explained.*

We left the meeting with a plan to host a memorial service towards the end of the week. However, that same afternoon, the university closed campus due to fears about COVID-19.



Soon after, our President announced the national lockdown. “What can we do? We can’t just go on as if nothing has happened,” Prof Nadar cried.

Sadly, there was nothing we could do as a group. And so, during phone calls, in Zoom meetings, via emails, in our activities, we mourned the loss and upheld the work and dignity of our sister:

- The team at the Methodist Church committed to ensuring that her body would be sent home and her apartment handed back to the landlord.
- Prof Nadar, drawing on help from another postdoc scholar, Megan, continued the work she and Alease had started on a journal edition to commemorate the life and work of Katie Geneva Cannon.
- Megan and Rhine resumed teaching the Honours class, online.
- Nontando Hadebe, The Circle’s ex officio coordinator of Southern Africa, stepped back into the role she had handed over to Alease.
- The postgraduate cohort of students, at which most of us had first met Alease, observed a moment of silence at the beginning of our first online meeting this year (2021).

As the days of the lockdown stretched into weeks and now months, with fear of COVID-19 mounting every day, the sense of loss of a dear sister did not ease. Just as we could not help sometimes feeling that the lockdown had taken some of our freedoms away, we also felt keenly that it had taken away our right to acknowledge and mourn Alease as a member of our community. And so, as we tried to reconcile ourselves to the practice of isolation, we also tried to make peace with this unAfrican, non-communal way of mourning. Needless to say, the memories remain unrelenting:

*“So, why did you decide to come back for your postdoc? Surely, you could have done it in America?”* I asked her during one of the Wednesday lunch meetings we had taken to having at the Gardens Shopping Centre in Cape Town.

*“I am not done. I am not done with Africa yet,”* she said with passion in her eyes.

*“What do you mean? Don’t you miss your family?”* She had just come back from the December holidays in America.

*“I do. In fact, my family didn’t want me to come back this year but I just had to.”*

I understood. Africa can do that to you.

Another time: As a Masters student in the company of postdoc fellows, I listened in awe as Alease and Megan discussed their plans for the class they were co-teaching, papers they wanted to publish and projects they wanted to pursue. All this was happening while standing around the office at the Centre in the afternoon of Ash Wednesday. Later Alease and I went to my church, Rosebank Methodist Church, for the service. On the way we started talking about our faith and Christianity, now that we had studied theology as an academic subject.

*“I am really struggling to reconcile my African identity to what I know now about Christianity,”* I confessed.

*“I don’t,”* she said.



*“Really? Don’t you sometimes wonder how life would be if African religion had been given the same recognition as Christianity?”*

*“I do but I also know I am committed to Christianity. It is a religion I choose now, flaws and all.”*

*“Really?”*

*“Yes. I love the rituals, the symbols, everything about the Christian faith. It makes me feel grounded.”*

How I pray for such conviction as I continue to question and doubt!

And so, as we, individually and sometimes communally, went about our daily lives, we thought of Alease. As the government closed off borders and airlines could no longer fly, some days we dared to ask, “Has her body gone home yet?” Not because we wanted her off the African soil, but because we kept thinking of her family, and asking ourselves, “How do you mourn when you have not seen the body? How do you say ‘rest in peace’ when you have not laid your loved one to rest?” You see, during this sad time, we also got to ‘meet’ Alease’s family. Some of us spoke to her sister, Althea. Alease was not just someone we knew. She was a daughter to her mother, a sister to her siblings and an aunt to her niece. She was as beloved to another family as she was to ours.

And now, as we mourn the deaths of other people we know, taken by COVID-19, and more recently, by gender-based violence, we also cry for the opportunity we lost as the South African family to mourn the loss of a dear sister. *Ukunqula amathambo alele ukuthula* (veneration of the sleeping bones) is a ritual premised on the belief that the bones of the dead don’t disappear into nothingness. Instead, they sleep peacefully and should be respected. This can only happen if the body of the departed has been buried.

Within an African traditional worldview, these bones only rest when they are buried in the person’s ancestral land. As each of us in the Centre pondered daily about when Alease’s body would return to the US, we did so because we could not imagine a family reaching closure of the death of a loved one without the opportunity to view and to bury the body. Death is, after all, an embodied experience and event, and burial is a key part of the ritual in this event. When we finally heard that her body landed back home in June, we all breathed a collective sigh of relief.

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*“And now, as we mourn the deaths of other people we know, taken by COVID-19, and more recently, by gender-based violence, we also cry for the opportunity we lost as the South African family to mourn the loss of a dear sister.”*

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In their reflections on gendered practices of death and mourning, many writers in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians have noted how some traditional practices can be fraught with pain and suffering for women. Yet we recognize that there are also some healing aspects to these practices. The moments of coming together, often in prayer, create a safe space to articulate pain and loss and to be comforted by others. In these moments, the departed’s value to the community is validated and their human dignity recognised. South Africa’s strict COVID-19 regulations allowed only fifty people to attend a funeral, and memorial services and vigils have become a thing of the past. The pain of the loss of these moments is painted right across many social media platforms – being unable to say goodbye to loved ones and unable to complete all the rituals of burial and bereavement. I imagine that once the

lockdown is lifted, there will be an exodus to the rural provinces, to the ancestral homes, to complete burial rituals for all the people who have died during the lockdown.

Within many African traditions and religions it is believed that people do not die. Instead, they depart to the land of the ancestors where they continue to serve the people they left behind. It is for this reason that in the Xhosa tradition, many families practice the ritual of 'bringing back' the departed. This is a way of giving dignity to the dead and of strengthening the relationship between the living and the dead. This is one of the rituals I expect will be performed many times during the exodus to the rural areas

The return of Alease's physical body to the USA means that the journey of grief has only just begun. As we continue to remember Alease, we hope the story of her life will be told for many generations, and as the strong African woman she was, that she will continue to counsel, protect and guide those of us she left behind.

And so, we live in the hope that, one day, we shall all meet again.  
Rest in peace, Alease!



## Staff profiles

**Director, Prof Sarojini Nadar** holds the Desmond Tutu SARChI Research Chair in Religion and Social Justice. Supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Lund Mission Society (LMS), the purpose of the Chair is to study the ways in which religious and faith traditions challenge or hold resources for social justice imperatives that produce sustainable societies. As an activist-academic, she is committed to intersectional socially engaged scholarship.



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. She sits on five international journal editorial boards including the Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, and she is also the editor-in-chief of the African Journal of Gender and Religion. Nadar is a B rated scholar by the National Research Foundation and has won numerous awards for teaching and research, among them the Department of Science and Technology Distinguished Young Woman in Science award in 2012; the Vice-Chancellor's Research Award at UKZN in 2015; the Distinguished Teachers Award in 2013.



**Senior researcher, Dr Lee Scharnick-Udemans'** research focuses on religious diversity,



pluralism and media. Dr Scharnick-Udemans graduated with a PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Cape Town in 2016. She is a Thuthuka grantholder for a project that explores the intersectional nature of religion and media studies in religiously diverse democratic societies. Dr Scharnick-Udemans is also a trained filmmaker with expertise in documenting issues and phenomena related to the religious landscape in South

Africa. In 2019 she was awarded a prestigious catalyst fellowship by the University of Edinburgh. She is the co-editor of the Journal for the Study of Religion and the managing editor of the African Journal of Gender and Religion, the media officer for the African Consortium of Law and Religion Studies and the secretary of the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa.

**Researcher, Dr Megan Robertson** is a postdoctoral fellow linked to the SARCHI Chair in



Religion and Social Justice, researching in the area of queer sexuality and institutional church culture. She is driven by a commitment to social justice and has a keen interest in developing method and pedagogical practice in that area. Dr Robertson did her Honours and Masters degrees in Sociology at Stellenbosch University and explored the ways in which race and gender are implicated in the institutional cultures of student residences and

organisations at the university.



**Administrator, Ms Ferial Marlie**, has been with the Centre since late 2018. Apart from providing logistical and administrative support, she also has skills in online and print design, creating and updating social media pages, managing publication processes associated with academic journals, as well as a solid background in database administration, which makes her skills invaluable for postgraduate student administration.

## Desmond Tutu Centre Team



Research Assistant, Nobesuthu Tom is a second-year Masters student whose research interests span African feminist theologies and African Traditional Religion. Nobesuthu coordinates the collaboration between the Centre, the UWC chapter of the Circle for Concerned Women Theologians and the broader Circle community.



Research Assistant, Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti, is a Masters student in his final year researching in the areas of sexual violence and pastoral care. Rhine is also currently serving as the Anglican Students Federation's Gender, Education and Transformation officer in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.



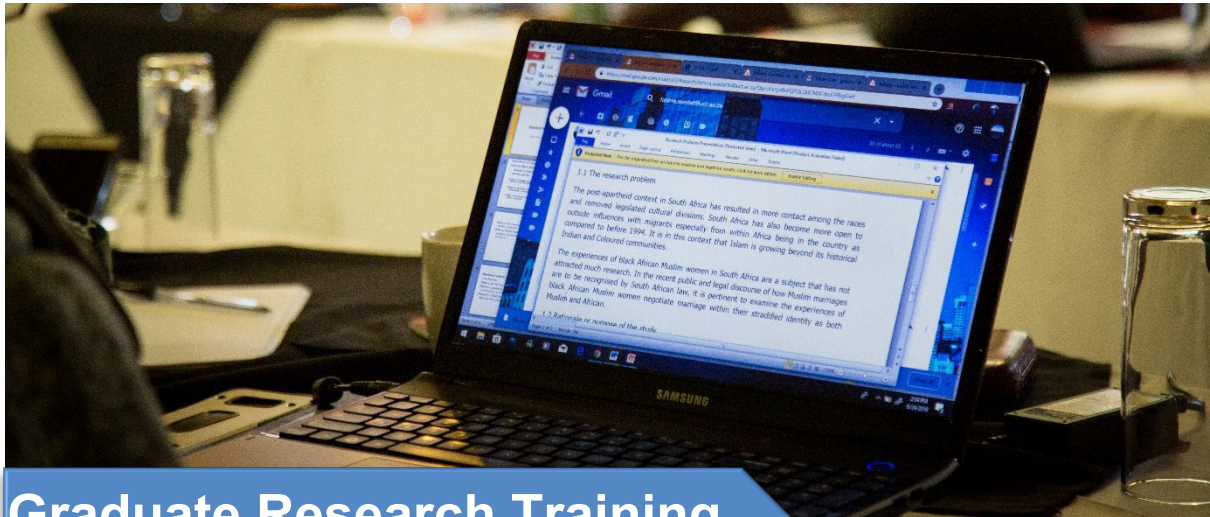
Research and journal assistant, Ashleigh Petersen is a Masters student researching in the areas of media and clergy sexual violence. Her research interests are gender-based violence as it pertains to religion.



Research and journal assistant, Sakeenah Dramat is a Masters student whose research interests are in religion and media studies. Her study centres on the portrayals of Islam and Muslims on a public broadcast television programme in South Africa.



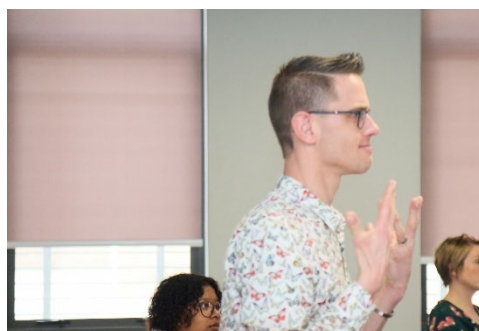
Research Assistant, Thozama Mabusela is a Masters student interested in Christianity and the black liberation struggle in South Africa.



## Graduate Research Training

The cohort model of supervision continued to be a focus for the Centre during the pandemic.

Since it was first launched in May 2017, the workshops have grown from being a UWC based program to a partnership with the Departments of Religious Studies and Gender Studies at UCT. Asonzeh Ukah, professor of religious studies, whose research focuses on the political economy of the sacred, and historiography of African religions, and Fatima Seedat, Senior Lecturer in Gender Studies whose research brings together Islamic Law and Gender, both help to supplement the supervision expertise available within the cohort. In addition, we have formed significant partnerships with Leeds University via the MOU that we have signed with The Centre for Religion and Public Life there.



Top left: Fatima Seedat, bottom left: Adriaan van Klinken, right: Asonzeh Ukah



## Online Cohort Supervision Workshops

The cohort model of supervision at the Centre, was developed from a concept note (see below) written by Sarojini Nadar and Sarasvathie Reddy, and draws heavily on the cohort model developed by Higher Education academics from UKZN. This model originally developed for PhD students was adapted for Masters students and a few selected Honors students.

### Concept Note for Cohort Supervision Workshops

The educational pedagogy is based on a “developmental trajectory” in three phases

1. Proposal Writing Phase
2. Data and/or Textual Production Phase
3. Data/Textual analysis and writing of the thesis report Phase

### Aim of the Workshops

- Save time and fast-track completion of proposals and theses/dissertations within the stipulated minimum completion times
- Supplement one-on-one supervision
- Add inter/trans-disciplinary richness
- Share and acquire supervision skills
- Provide collegial interaction and peer support
- Promote student-centred learning
- Stimulate higher order thinking and produce critical researchers

The phases are flexible

Students can proceed to the next phase if they work at accelerated paces.

For each phase, facilitators work with a group of 12-15 students.

The workshops take place over six three-day sessions.

The first day is set aside to introduce the theme of the weekend. This session is presented by someone with expertise in the theme. After the presentation students break away into smaller groups and are provided with the opportunity to engage and critique the presentation.

The next day is dedicated to student presentations which are scheduled in advance, as students are briefed beforehand as to what the requirements for their presentations are. Time is allocated for both the presentations and intensive feedback from peers and facilitators. On the final day, presentations continue after input from an expert (usually a facilitator from within the cohort) on the specific topic related to the weekend theme.

PHASE 1: Proposal Writing Phase	PHASE 2: Data and/or Textual Production Phase	PHASE 3: Data and/or Textual Analysis and the Write-Up Phase
<p><b>Workshop 1:</b> Research Focus/Area of interest/Rationale</p> <p><b>Workshop 2:</b> Literature review</p> <p><b>Workshop 3:</b> Conceptual/theoretical framework</p> <p><b>Workshop 4:</b> Research Approaches/ Methodologies</p> <p><b>Workshop 5:</b> Data Analysis Strategies/Ethical Considerations</p> <p><b>Workshop 6:</b> Presentation of full draft proposal</p>	<p><b>Workshop 1:</b> Preparation of Data and Textual production tools</p> <p><b>Workshop 2:</b> Conducting Interviews/Focus Group Discussions /and/or Discerning &amp; Comprehension of relevant textual material</p> <p><b>Workshop 3:</b> Presentation of research Design Chapter</p> <p><b>Workshop 4:</b> Interpretation and Managing of Empirical Data and Texts</p> <p><b>Workshop 5:</b> Discourse/Content/ Thematic/ Conceptual Analysis</p> <p><b>Workshop 6:</b> Aligning Data and Textual Material to Theory</p>	<p><b>Workshop 1:</b> How to write a thesis and academic writing skills</p> <p><b>Workshop 2:</b> Presentation of Draft Chapters</p> <p><b>Workshop 3:</b> Presentation of Draft Chapters</p> <p><b>Workshop 4:</b> Presentation of Draft Chapters</p> <p><b>Workshop 5:</b> Presentation of Draft Chapters</p> <p><b>Workshop 6:</b> Preparing the Thesis for Examination</p>

Phase 1 LEARNING OUTCOMES	Phase 2 LEARNING OUTCOMES	Phase 3 LEARNING OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of how to translate a real-life problem into a research problem</li> <li>• An understanding of the research process (literature review, theoretical frameworks, research approaches, analysis strategies and ethical considerations) required to write the research proposal</li> <li>• The skill to identify relevant and appropriate literature, theoretical framework, research approach, analysis strategy and ethical considerations when writing the research proposal</li> <li>• The ability to write a complete research proposal according to the required format and to be able to orally defend such a research proposal at the relevant forum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of data/textual production tools and strategies used in the research process</li> <li>• An understanding of how to implement data/textual production tools and strategies in the research process</li> <li>• The skill to produce the data required for the analysis process</li> <li>• The ability to develop a coherent set of data that is ready for the analysis phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of data and/or textual analysis strategies</li> <li>• An understanding of how to align data and textual material to theory in the writing of the relevant chapters in the thesis</li> <li>• The skill of academic writing in the compilation and write-up of the chapters of the thesis</li> <li>• The ability to write a complete thesis according to the required level for the examination process and to write a journal article that is acceptable for publication based on the research findings of the thesis</li> <li>• The ability to critically engage in the research process</li> </ul>

The realization of the outcomes of the workshops relies on not just the content of the presentations, but on the peer relationships which students and supervisors develop. These relationships organically set up mutual accountability and support. The supervisors on the programme had to work very hard to figure out how to translate the very embodied ways of working in these workshops onto virtual spaces. To manage the large numbers of students who had signed up to participate we held two combined workshops (that spanned several online seminars) with both UCT and UWC students, and several smaller workshops with the students from the Gender Studies cohort at UCT. While not ideal, this helped to manage the shift from the physical to the virtual space. Here we report on the two larger UWC cohort workshops that were held in 2020.

## Cohort I

### Online: Zoom, 19 May – 4 June

Our first meeting for the year was scheduled for March 2020. Due to Covid-19 we had to rethink the ways in which we could transpose our usual embodied meetings onto an online platform. This resulted in a series of eight online meetings. The first meeting was held in May 2020. This 2-hour 'meet and greet' zoom session was an opportunity for the Centre to connect



with affiliated students, to gauge their current circumstances and to brief them on how future online workshops would take place. The second session took place later that month and took the form of a 'Masterclass' with Adriaan van Klinken, from Leeds University, on the topic of writing a literature review. Before the session a paper, "Transforming masculinities towards gender justice in an era of HIV and AIDS: Plotting the pathways" written by van

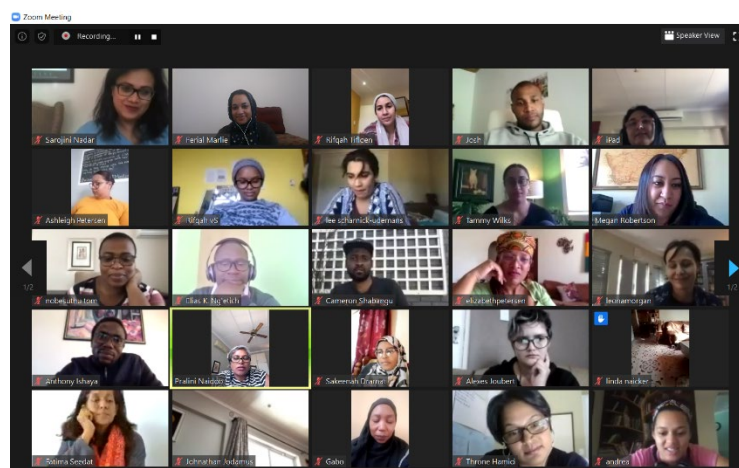
Klinken was circulated to students. Megan Robertson, postdoc scholar in the Centre, interviewed van Klinken on the structure of a literature review, how to engage with the literature in critical ways and how to incorporate literature in the findings. Megan Robertson also produced an instructional video that was made available to students on how to conduct a literature search: you can access this video [here](#). These initial input sessions were followed by three consecutive weeks of student presentations on literature review and research focus. We hosted a total of six presentation sessions over the three weeks. We met twice a week via the online platform, Zoom, for approximately three hours at a time. In each session, 4 to 6 students conducted presentations and received feedback from their peers and supervisors. The sessions were attended on average by 28 students and 7 supervisors/facilitators from UWC, UCT and Ghent University. Out of the 28 students, 20 submitted their research focus and presented their literature review section.



Reflecting on this process, the team identified several advantages and disadvantages to hosting graduate training workshops online. First, a number of students reported that, while not ideal, the online space was useful in terms of:

- 1) keeping them connected to an academic community,
- 2) allowing international students who had previously missed workshops due to challenges in travelling to South Africa to participate, and
- 3) enabling students to maintain a sense of commitment to their academic journey. The most valuable component of these workshops was probably the space it created for students to think through how they would re-design their research methodologies and methods in light of the pandemic.

While all the above was enormously helpful, as already noted, the team also recognised that what we were able to achieve in an embodied space was not easily duplicated on an online platform. The engagement was interrupted by technological difficulties and 'Zoom fatigue' soon set in for students and facilitators. We took time to review and reflect on the process and planned something different for the following workshop on Theories and Concepts.



Notwithstanding the challenges of working within the online spaces, we were able to support a number of students in their new and existing research journeys. Below is a list of some of the student projects:

### Doctoral Students

**Ishaya Anthony:**

Religion and Media

**Tammy Wilks:**

Religious Diversity

**Winnie Varghese:**

Gender, Goddesses and Power

**Pralini Naidoo:**

Gender and Critical Food Studies

**Leona Morgan:**

Healing, Sexual Trauma and Spirituality

**Elias Ngetich:**

Pentecostalism and Social Development in Kenya

**Felix Owusu:**

Liberation theologies

### Masters Students

**Ashleigh Petersen:**

Religion, Media and Clergy Sexual abuse

**Andrea Alexander:**

Decolonial and Feminist Pedagogy

**Cameron Shabangu:**

Religion, Race and Pentecostalism

**Gaboisitswe Kgomongwe:**

Gender, Muslim Marriage and African tradition

**Nobesuthu Tom:**

Decolonial Epistemology and African Traditional Religion

**Rhine Koloti:**

Pastoral care and Clergy Sexual Abuse

**Sakeenah Dramat:**

Religion and Media (Muslim representations)

**Shenillah Mohamed:**

Muslim women and Sexual agency

**Rifqah Tifloen:**

Deep Ecology, Eco-Feminism and Green religions

**Rifqah van Schalkwyk:**

Women in Mosque Movements

**Thozama Mabusela:**

Black liberation theology

### Honours

**Joshua Abrahams:**

Sexual Diversity and the Anglican Church

**Alexes Joubert:**

Shame, social media and religion

## Cohort II

### Online: Zoom, 9 and 10 September

The second Cohort workshop for 2020 was held online on 9 and 10 September 2020, and students and advisors virtually connected from various locations in South Africa and abroad to participate. The theme for this workshop was *Theories and Concepts*. The students were given three articles; Beyond the Text: Between Islam and Feminism, Sitting in Difference: Queering the Study of Islam,

and Islam, Feminism, and Islamic Feminism: Between Inadequacy and Inevitability by Fatima Seedat, from the University of Cape Town, to read prior to the workshop. Sarojini Nadar and Fatima Seedat, pre-recorded an interview where Nadar engaged Seedat on several important



questions related to the theme. They spoke at length about the importance of theories and concepts for scholarly work; Seedat provided some important insight into the relationship between concepts and theories, drawing on her own doctoral work by way of example, and they together reflected on how theories and concepts are important in understanding the real-life problems that research attempts to address. They closed off with a discussion of both the importance and the limitations of theory.

Students watched the pre-recording prior to the online workshop, and at the workshop they were able to engage Nadar and Seedat on the recording as well as ask questions pertaining to their specific research projects.

Overall, students found the pre-recorded session beneficial for their own projects: As one student reports:

*The convoluted components of the theories and concepts chapter were taken apart and put together in exact parts that we could understand clearly. The interview provided the basis from which we could formulate our questions for Prof Nadar and Dr Seedat regarding how to develop our theories and concepts chapters, respectively. We received resources that underpinned this discussion beforehand and came to the discussion prepared to ask questions and hoped that answers would emerge from this discussion to assist us out of the writers' rut that many postgrad candidates found themselves.*

Masters candidate, Sakeenah Dramat

Following the Theories and Concepts Q&A session twelve students made presentations over the course of two days, resulting in over six hours of presentation time, three hours of Q&A and a further three hours of open discussion.

As usual, students were invited to chair the presentation blocks, and this offered them the opportunity to actively participate in each facet of the cohort as well as sharpen their leadership skills. As Sakeenah Dramat notes again:

*Chairing these sessions helped to sharpen our leadership skills as we were active participants in this process of knowledge production rather than passive sponges. This technique is unlike any other I have experienced previously, and it kept us interested in presentations throughout Cohort. Cohort II was a benefit to Candidates of both UWC and UCT as we were able to receive feedback from esteemed Scholars in our field who have been perfecting their craft over the years. The feedback they provided allowed us as Postgraduate candidates to gain deeper understanding and insight about our topics and those of our colleagues.*



Photo by Martin Sanchez on unsplash



## COVID-19 Psycho-Social Support

Since lockdown began the DTC team has sought to offer continued academic support to our students and colleagues in ways that recognise the various challenges and realities we have all experienced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In our various check-ins with students, we noted that lockdown had brought about various emotional and mental strains for individuals and for the postgraduate group as a whole. While we collectively began to navigate the challenges of online learning and supervision, we also decided to explore ways in which the Centre could support students holistically. We therefore invited Lynn-Joy Isaacs, a registered counsellor and facilitator, to collaboratively explore ways in which we can provide support and care in this time. Lynn-Joy attended several of our online sessions to gauge the level of support needed.



Lynn-Joy Isaacs

After an initial needs assessment, Ms Isaacs began a combination of group and individual debrief sessions in June 2020 and which concluded in December 2020. These sessions were guided by the needs of the students and themes which have emerged in discussions include group anxiety and guilt in relation to productivity, creating time and productivity solutions, and balancing family stresses and academic commitments.

The aim of providing additional spaces for holistic student support was not driven by a push for students to proceed with “business as usual”. Rather, this was guided by our commitment to support students to maintain their own academic goals and targets. For many students a postgraduate degree is a promise of future economic opportunities – one which few can afford to delay even at a time of global pandemic. Similarly, for some, time spent on pursuing a degree often equates to less time spent earning an income. Assisting students to cope with the current stressors in order to achieve their academic goals is therefore an integral part of a feminist, just and democratic space of learning. See full report appended to this document.

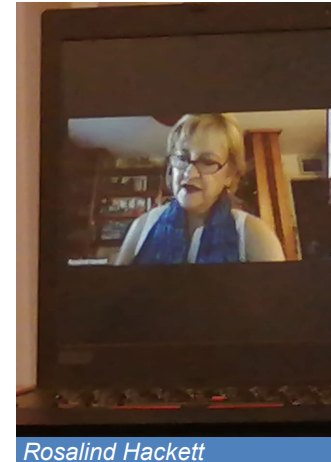


## Retreats/Workshops

### 'Mediatized Religion' Workshop

**Ruslamere, 7 and 8 October**

One of the few in-person engagements for 2020, was a workshop hosted by Lee Scharnick-Udemans, as part of the NRF Thuthuka Grant project entitled, *The Mediatization of Religious Diversity and Religious Pluralism*. With its focus on religion and media the project provides students with both a space to engage with cutting edge research in the field, and the opportunity to explore “the media turn” in the study of religion and theology in greater detail. The workshop was held with three students from the Centre all of whom are working on projects that have an established media orientation. The workshop comprised peer to peer planning sessions, group presentations, collective supervision sessions and a number of one-on-one consultations. The workshop culminated with a two-hour virtual workshop with leading scholar of religion and media and recently appointed Extraordinary Professor in the Centre, Rosalind Hackett from the University of Nashville in Tennessee, in the United States. During this session, each student presented their research focus and literature review chapters and were provided with feedback from Prof Hackett.



Rosalind Hackett

Students found the workshops to be invaluable for their work, and in particular, were grateful for the opportunity to meet in embodied ways, albeit with physical distancing protocols in place.

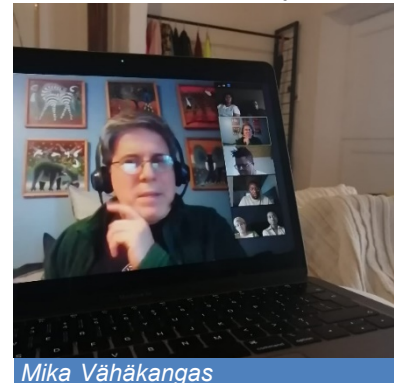
Student testimonial:

*“The workshop allowed me to have very interactive, systematic and critical sections with my supervisors on literature review chapter and preparation for data production in Nigeria. Also, it gave me a platform to network with a renowned media scholar Prof Rosalind Hackett. Prof Hackett’s insightful comments on the presentation were very contextual and helpful.”*  
PhD candidate, Ishaya Anthony

## Data Analysis and Scholarly Writing Retreat

### Stanford Valley, 13-20 November

The other in-person activity that we were able to host in 2020, was a data analysis and scholarly writing retreat for students and staff in November. One of the aims of the workshop was to offer students input and support from leading academics in the field. Apart from the supervision provided by the facilitators from the Centre and UWC who attended the workshop (Prof Sarojini Nadar, Dr Lee Scharnick-Udemans, Dr Megan Robertson, Dr Johnathan Jodamus), students also engaged virtually with Professor Mika Vähäkangas from Lund University, a recently appointed Extraordinary Professor in the Centre. He gave the students critical feedback on their individual projects and also mentored them with regards to working in the academy and collaborating internationally.



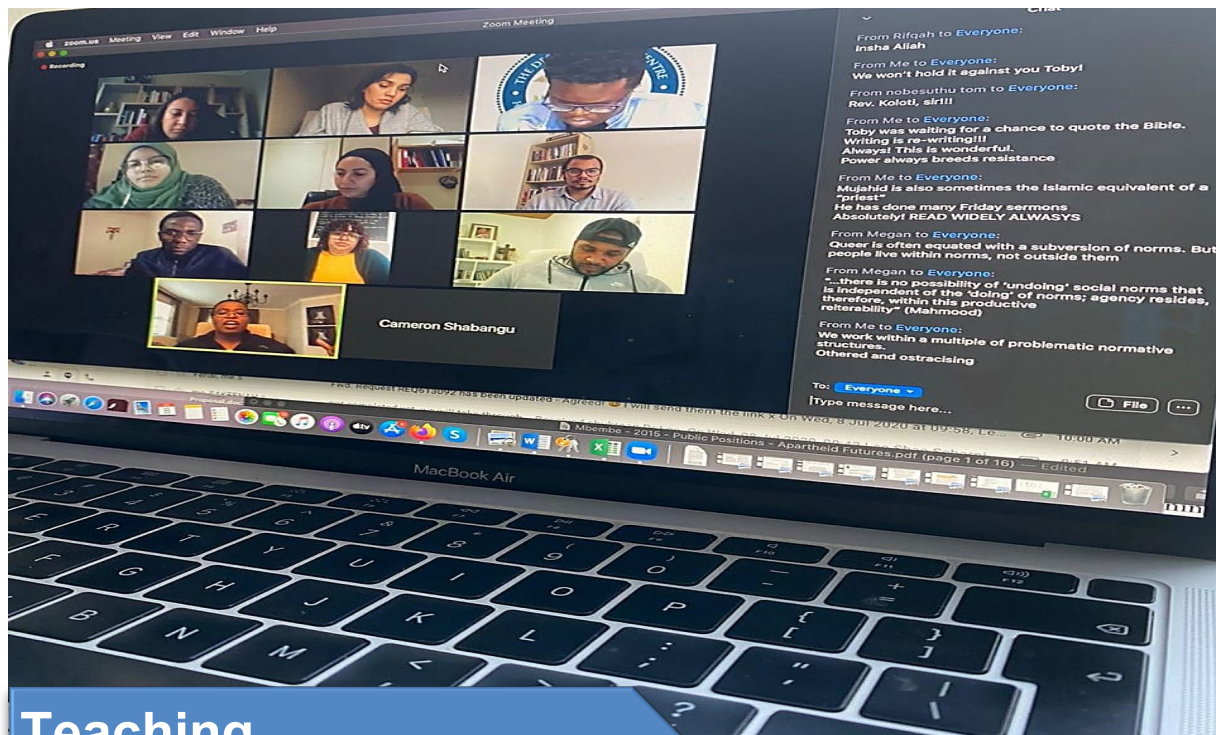
The second aim of the retreat was to provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their data and to write. Most students who attended had already produced their empirical and textual data and were ready to either write up their full dissertations, or their full proposals. Over the past three years, the Centre has found that, providing students with dedicated time and space to write without the usual disturbances and demands of home and work life, has enabled them to achieve measurable writing goals.



For many students, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the demands on their time and, for some, created home environments which were not conducive to writing. The workshop provided a rare opportunity in 2020 for them to write in an undisturbed yet supportive environment. Some of the feedback from students reflects the importance of the retreats for their projects and progress:

*"The retreat came at an opportune time for me as my sister and her 3-year-old son had just come from the Eastern Cape to live with me in Cape Town. I was struggling to adjust to working in an environment with a child. The retreat gave me space and time to reflect on why I had chosen the topic I am working on. I found the online consultation with Professor Mika Vähäkangas particularly helpful as he gave me guidance on how I could refine my research topic and set criteria for selecting the scholars whose work I want to focus on."*  
Masters candidate, Nobesuthu Tom

*The workshop was like a charge forward, an energizing experience and a creative space that propelled me (and I think my fellow postgrads as well) towards finishing our individual research projects. Embodied spaces, embodied interactions and words of affirmations are somethings which the year 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic have proven to be hard to get from various online platforms or self-help YouTube videos lessons, however, the synergy of face-to-face contact and interchange (whilst following necessary Covid-19 protocols), with our research peers and supervisors at the writing retreat managed to fill that lacuna – and for that Thank you, eNkosi, Rea leboha, Siyabonga, Baie dankie.”*  
Masters candidate, Rhine Koloti



## Teaching

### Reading group

The *ReligioTheo* reading group was launched in 2020 just before the pandemic. Its objective is to bring together post-graduate students and academic staff to read and analyse key academic and popular texts in the study of religion and theology. Following the UWC graduate attributes of criticality towards knowledge, contribution to the social good, and an attitude of lifelong learning, the reading group is a space where the overarching skills and abilities that these attributes imbibe can be developed, practiced and honed.



The group is decolonially feminist in its orientation. As scholar of religion, Mallory Nye (2019) explains, “Decolonization is about changing how people think, talk, and act through a radical engagement with a plurality of voices and perspectives that have been historically marginalized and silenced.” To that end the intellectual work of the group and its commitment to social justice are aligned through the practices of the space and the choice of materials and topics.

- Osman, M & Shaikh, S. 2017. Islam, Muslims and politics of queerness in Cape Town. *African Journal of Gender and Religion*, 23 (2): 43 - 67.
- Chidester, D. 2008. Dreaming in the contact zone: Zulu dreams, visions, and religion in nineteenth-century South Africa. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 76 (1): 27 -53.
- Hoel, N & Shaikh, S. 2007. Veiling, secularism and Islamism: Gender constructions in France and Iran. *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 20 (1): 111 - 129.



- Ukah, A. 2016. 'Religion in the pre-contact Old World: Africa', in Garrard-Burnett, V., Freston, P., & Dove, S (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 47 -61.
- Antony, M. 2018. That's a stretch: Reconstructing, rearticulating, and commodifying yoga. *Frontiers in Communication*, 3 (47).
- Brooks, K & Martin, K. 2019. *The Lemonade Reader*. Routledge: Oxon.

The group hosts bi-weekly reading discussions, lectures, seminars and workshops that respond to critical, theoretical, and empirical questions in the decolonial, feminist and trans-disciplinary study of religion and theology. Before each reading group meeting participants were asked to reflect on the selected reading's implications for the study of religion and theology as well as how it connected to their own research projects. These reflections were circulated amongst the group before meeting and formed the initial prompts for group discussion. Participants were encouraged to pose questions and to engage in further critical discussion during the meeting.

Nobesuthu Tom, a Masters student, sums up the value of the reading group for her:

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*I have found the reading group valuable... [in that I received] exposure to a breadth of reading materials I would not have looked for on my own. The requirement to submit written engagement with the readings helps me develop critical reading skills. I have learnt new concepts that, at first, I would not have associated with my research topic but, as I strive to answer the question about how the reading relates to my own research, I see links that I would not have seen before. Opportunity to engage directly with experienced authors in the field (e.g. session with Prof Ukah) and allowing group members to lead the discussions shows Lee's commitment to make the Reading Group a space of growth for all the participants... The camaraderie of the group has helped me develop relationships with my colleagues such that I am able to ask for and share resources with them outside of the group environment. The facilitators of the Reading Group, Lee and Megan, have created a learning space that is about both academic achievement and other life skills e.g. the discussion in the last Reading Group was helpful in shaping my thinking about forging a career in the academy.*

*Overall, I am very grateful to be part of this group because I know that the quality of the teaching and support I am getting is far greater than my peers within the department and other postgraduate courses are getting."*

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As part of the DTCRSJ commitment to public scholarship and community engagement, a dedicated website will soon be launched, where all the discussions for the group will be made available via audio and transcript. The site will be a space where audio-visual material related to the study of religion and theology, from a variety of critical perspectives will be available to the public at no cost.

## ETH321: Moral Discourses on Gender and Human Sexuality



Dr Megan Robertson



Dr Johnathan Jodamus

This module was co-taught by Johnathan Jodamus from the Department of Religion and Theology and Megan Robertson from the DTCRSJ. They are working together with Sarojini Nadar on a publication focusing on pedagogy, that falls under the thematic focus area of Religion and Education, within the SARChI Chair in Religion and Social Justice.

They have recently submitted an abstract titled “Transdisciplinary, Transgressive and Transformative: Pedagogical Reflections on Sexual Ethics, Religion, and Gender” for an international conference on Gender Studies in Africa, to take place in Uganda later in 2021.

The class was facilitated primarily in an inductive way where students were asked to respond to popular media constructions on the topics through a gender-critical lens. Students were introduced to feminist and gendered approaches to interpreting and analysing the lived experiences presented via the various media sources. Nobesuthu Tom and Rhine Koloti also joined the team as tutors.

By providing opportunities (made possible via the SARChI Chair funding) to Megan Robertson, Nobesuthu Tom and Rhine Koloti to teach and tutor, the Centre and Chair continue to build capacity for the next generation of scholars, whose research is also linked to the teaching content of the course. For example, in this module, students studied how moral discourses are formed around gender identity and sexual diversity. They also examined the ways in which these moral discourses are being transformed by those who act with individual and collective ‘moral agency’ to “talk back” to the discursive production of sexual and gender norms. The module focused in particular on the ways in which cultural and religious traditions in general (Christianity in particular) are responsible for the formation of moral discourses on gender identity and sexual diversity and the ways in which these discourses are challenged from the lived experiences of those who identify outside of the gender and sexual norms. Framed within a strong feminist ethics approach the module focused on lived experiences of: 1) women who had been violated by so-called corrective rape, 2) queer clergy and Christians and 3) positive sexuality in music.

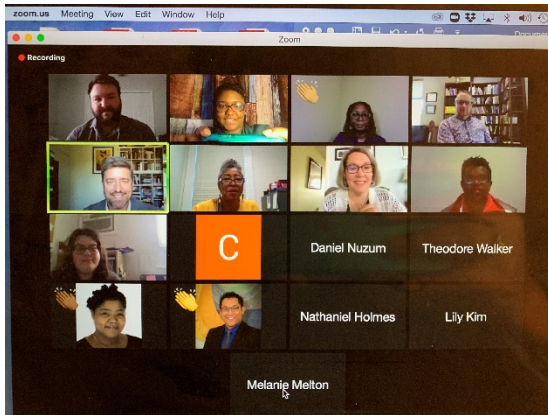
Due to COVID-19 this course was taught online for the first time. This was done by creating lessons for each week which students could complete. Each lesson consisted of a series of tasks framed around preparation, readings, lectures, tutorials and assignments. Specific learning outcomes were provided to students for each week in order for them to assess whether they were keeping up with the work or if they needed further engagement with the teaching team.



## Workshops and Conferences

### Practical Theology Biennial Conference

Houston, Texas, May 2020



Several conferences for 2020, were either cancelled, postponed, or shifted to an online platform. One such conference, which was shifted to an online platform, was the Practical Theology Biennial Conference that was scheduled to take place in Houston, Texas, in 2020.

When the Tutu Centre hosted a research methodology interview seminar, on 3 October 2019, between Masters students, Mr Rhine Koloti, Ms Ashleigh Petersen and Prof Evelyn

Parker on her research methodology for her project on religious leaders and Youth Partner Violence, little did we realise that this would open up conference opportunities for Rhine Koloti. Prof Parker encouraged Mr Koloti to submit a proposal for the 2020 Association of Practical Theology Biennial Conference, planned to take place in Houston, Texas.

Mr Koloti submitted his proposal and the conference committee selected his proposal in the first round of those evaluated, which indicated it was relevant to the conference theme and held promise for making a significant contribution to the paper session of the conference. In 2020 Rhine was due to present his paper at the conference, however due to the COVID-19 pandemic the conference was modified and convened through an online zoom session in May 2020. The theme of the conference was “This is my body”: The Human Body as Site for Intersectional Discourse on Practical Theology and Bioethics”.

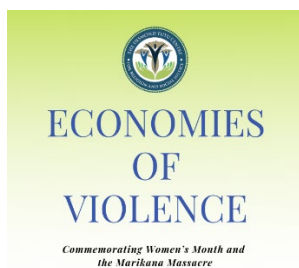
In his paper, Mr Koloti drew on the broader scholarship in Practical Theology which has theorized clergy sexual abuse and interrogated selected theologies of the Anglican Church of South Africa (ACSA) for the ways in which it influences how male clergy perceive the female body. As Masters degree candidate, Mr Rhine Koloti was the only speaker in his level of study with most speakers comprising of PhD candidates and post-doctoral fellows. Evelyn Parker reported as follows:

*“I just want to report that Rhine gave a provocative and thoughtful paper today during the APT virtual conference. His delivery and his response to the questions were excellent! The other two papers were doctoral students, one from McMaster University and the other Princeton Theological Seminary... Thank you for encouraging Rhine to participate in the APT conference and supporting him as he prepared. I am looking to publish selected papers from the conference with the Journal of Theology and Science or perhaps another that will allow the intersectional thinking between Bioethics and Practical Theology that I sought to design for the conference... I will approach Rhine for submission to the conference proceedings to be published in a journal, but after he completes his thesis, the priority.”*

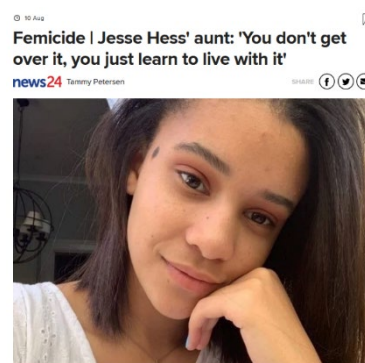
## Economies of Violence

### Online: Zoom, 31 August 2020

On 31 August, the Centre held its fourth annual public lecture in commemoration of the 1956 Women's March and 2012 Marikana Massacre. Under the theme of "Economies of Violence", the annual lecture seeks to uncover the multi-faceted ways in which women, people of colour and marginalised men experience oppression and exploitation. This year's keynote speaker was Professor of Christian Ethics and African American Studies at Drew University (Madison, New Jersey), Rev Dr Traci West.



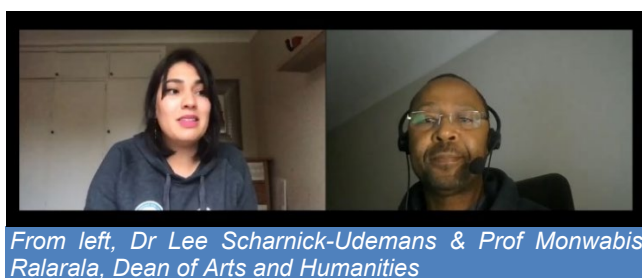
At the beginning of 2020, the DTCRSJ submitted a proposal to faculty to name this annual lecture (in its 4th cycle) after Jesse Hess. Jesse was an 18-year-old 1st year student, registered in the department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape who, in 2019, was found raped and murdered next to her 85-year-old grandfather who was also murdered in their home. While the faculty unequivocally voted in favour of the proposal, unfortunately the disruption of COVID-19 halted the process of application for this named lecture. However, during the proceedings of the 2020 EoV lecture her name was invoked as a reminder of the impetus for critical interrogation of the systems, beliefs and practices that reinforce and support violence against women.



The event was held via an online platform which allowed a total of 109 participants to join. This included a cohort of local and international guests. Vice-chancellor Professor Tyrone Pretorius and Dean of the Arts Faculty, Professor Monwabisi Ralarala opened the events with rousing reflections on the importance of intersectional inquiries into the multiple sites and systems of violence that characterise public and private life.



Prof Tyrone Pretorius, VC



From left, Dr Lee Scharnick-Udemans & Prof Monwabisi Ralarala, Dean of Arts and Humanities

Lee Scharnick-Udemans and Megan Robertson welcomed participants on behalf of the Centre and framed the importance of the EOV lecture in 2020, highlighting how Jesse Hess's life, murder, and constitutive absence holds great significance for the community of staff and students at UWC. They also noted that UWC was celebrating 60 years of existence and commemorated the strong tradition of the "university of the left" that consciously and intentionally opposes injustice – contained in its slogan - "hope through action."

The event also made space for moments of reflection, as students of the centre lit a candle in remembrance of victims and survivors of violent economic exclusion and gender-based violence. Poet, Veronique Jephthas, also performed her poem “Dear Mr President” which reflected the themes of the event (reproduced here with poet’s permission).

### Dear Mr President

I come to serve you breakfast  
And even spill a little tea on your fancy suit

Your silence echoes loud  
And speaks 1000 words  
I know you probably wanna forget

Move forward  
Business as usual  
But allow me to stop you in your tracks, preach  
and read you a verse.

This is verse 0-100  
Of we have had enough of you and your  
ministers in your fancy suits, bullet proof cars  
and big houses paying us no regards  
This is no time for you to be holding a press  
conference and offering your condolences  
No time for you to be visiting families and  
offering them money while you get  
photographed to benefit your campaign

This is war so put your weapons to use  
Blood has been flowing from one too many taps  
and in hope that it drips and drips and drips and  
drips on your fancy suit  
So that the stain is impossible to get out.

I hope it stays as a constant reminder.  
I hope it echoes loud.  
I hope it screams something happened here.  
I hope it screams something is happening in my  
country, I hope it screams I have been let down  
by my president.

May that echo in halls and churches and in  
schools and the grocery store  
May it scream I was at home  
I went to the post office  
I was with my grandmother  
I went to school  
I was with my husband  
I was only a baby

I want you to know they have been born again in  
me and set my spirit alright  
My house their names in my mouth and change  
my address to theirs  
So that their names may dance gracefully from  
my tongue to broken records you have recorded  
for them

And I don't know if you remember how the  
record goes but it goes like this

Nene  
Courtney  
Karabo  
Reeva  
Hannah  
Amy  
Veisha  
Xolile  
Noxolo  
Zanele  
Anyone  
Mary  
Barbara  
Leighandré  
Hope  
Lynelle  
Kamelle ...

If I didn't know better I would think we are in hell  
This is an attack on woman and an attack on  
your country  
Could you please pay attention and load your  
presidential gun, please?

May the bloodstain on your fancy suit never  
wash out.  
May it stay as a constant reminder.  
May it scream something is happening in my  
country  
May it scream I have been let down by my  
president.

In her riveting lecture, Traci West underscored the importance of disruption. Illustrating the



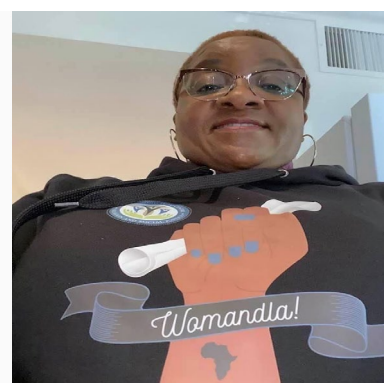
Rev Dr Traci West

ways in which racism and religion symbiotically co-operate in sustaining economies of violence, she called for disruptive methodological processes that in turn nurture an ethos of moral leadership. Among the elements due for disruption is the pervasive narrative of violence that tends to flatten the intersectional experiences of, for example, black women. This was a narrative that posits a binary between the victim who is shamed and the survivor who is celebrated – while neither is afforded empathy, resources or support, she argued. And further entrenching this binary and its

harmful outcomes, which include the ubiquitous “strong black woman” trope, are generally the social, religious and cultural networks to which she might be affiliated. Intertwined economies of support, contended West, would therefore call us to look at the systems and structures from which this violence emanates, interrogate the beliefs that serve to excuse it, and from that vantage destabilise its presumed truths.

Disrupting economies of violence also means that concepts and practice must mutually inform each other as opposed to the top-down order traditionally preferred by the academy. West emphasised the need to question heteronormative understandings of women and men and how that might shape our ideas around autonomy. This allows for a humility in theorising and openness in practice that ultimately lend themselves to meaningful transformation. Seeming to value this in the delivery of this very lecture, the awareness of her own geo-political positionality saw her periodically pose questions to the South African-based audience, making sure to draw linkages between the two countries while leaving room for key differences to which she might not be privy.

Last, West called for a defiant spirituality, one that has the courage to confront hypocrisies and betrayals; Hypocrisies and betrayals that look like a constitution that affords women protection from violence in a country that reports the highest global rates of gender-based violence or a state that paints ‘Black Lives Matter’ on its most prominent road while upholding a mass prison industrial complex that destroys black communities or religious leaders who condemn abusers in word yet protect them in deed. She praised the efforts of Cape Town-based lesbian activist collective, Free Gender, applauding them for queering their definition of spirituality as well as their exceptional transnational Africana project. As she noted, transnational solidarity is crucial to destabilising economies of violence.



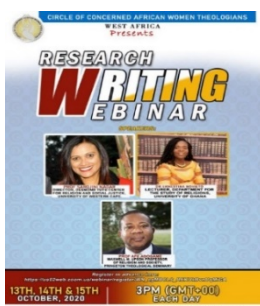
From left: Prof Pumla Gqola, Prof Adriaan van Klinken, and Rev Canon Nontombi Tutu sporting their DTCRSJ hoodies designed for the event



## Research Writing Workshop

**Online: Zoom, 13-15 October 2020**

The webinar was hosted by the West African Chapter of the *Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*. Nadar facilitated an online session for almost 200 participants, and found the session to be massively challenging as online platforms are not conducive to workshopping ideas or encouraging interaction.



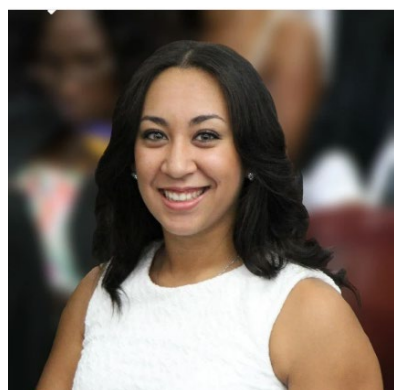
Notwithstanding, the group appreciated the time spent, and reported that they found the principles and guidelines to be important pointers in the right direction of their research journeys.

## Centre for Religion and Public Life Seminar Series

**Online: Zoom, 26 November 2020**

In November 2020, Megan Robertson presented a paper titled, “Butch Lesbians, Femme Queens and Promiscuous Clergy: Queering the Body of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa” at the CRPL’s online seminar series. The paper is derived from Megan’s recently completed PhD and her invitation to present the paper is a signal that her important research is already gaining international recognition.

CRPL Seminar Series: ‘Butch Lesbians, Femme Queens and Promiscuous Clergy: Queering the Body Politics of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa’ – Nov, 2020



In the paper Robertson used the case study of the Methodist Church to argue that while representation remains an important aspect of institutional transformation, it is problematic if this remains the ultimate measure of inclusivity. Using a queer feminist lens, she explored the lived and embodied experiences of three queer women clergy in the MCSA and the gendered ways in which legitimacy is attached to their identity as ministers. This paper will be published as a chapter in the forthcoming “Routledge Handbook of Religion,

Gender and Society” edited by Emma Tomalin and Caroline Starkey.

## Community Engagement

### Aspiration Inspiration – Success on the Cape Flats

Online, Facebook: 22 June 2020

Ashleigh Petersen, a Masters student, was invited as a guest on Aspiration Inspiration, an online series hosted by Jayson George, that shares success stories of individuals from the Cape Flats.

Petersen was invited to talk about her experiences as a first-generation double graduate. The series aims to provide practical insights on how featured guests achieved their successes despite facing challenges similar to those experienced by other young people on the Cape Flats.

In the interview Petersen spoke about the ways in which she felt young people in her community of Delft, limited themselves due to their circumstances. She also shared the pressure and difficulties of her university career including her journey from an Honours student in the Desmond Tutu Centre, to a research assistant and journal assistant for the African Journal of Gender and Religion. She also emphasised the importance of having a strong support system and went on to encourage the audience to rewrite predominant narratives of the Cape Flats which characterise it as a place of hopelessness and inopportunity. She cited the opportunities she has been presented with, for example, engaging with experts in the field of religion and theology, as proof of the ways in which these narratives may be nuanced.

The full interview can be accessed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luEf0uyNh7Anglican>

### Anglican Church of Southern Africa – Call to Action on Gender Based Violence

Online: Facebook, 22 July 2020



The sharp increase in gender-based violence during the lockdown, brought to public attention the seriousness of an existing social challenge. Even the President in one of his COVID addresses, acknowledged that GBV had reached pandemic proportions.

Prof Nadar joined a group of Anglican women clergy and theological scholars to draft a statement regarding gender-based violence that was presented to Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, in a Facebook live public engagement. The event inspired a number

of practical commitments, including the possibility of a Masters scholarship at UWC that will enable research on church policies with regard to GBV. This is the link to the online conversation: <https://youtu.be/k4LI0OVkhSI> and the full statement is appended to the end of this report.

## Conversation on Gender and Climate Change

**Online: Zoom, 29 August 2020**

One of the five key focus areas of the Centre, is on religion and the environment. On 29 August 2020, Masters student, Rhine Koloti, who is also the Gender Education and Transformation officer of the Anglican Students Federation (ASF), chaired an online conversation between the director of Green Anglicans, Rachel Mash and students from ASF in universities from South Africa, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Lesotho, Eswatini and Mozambique.



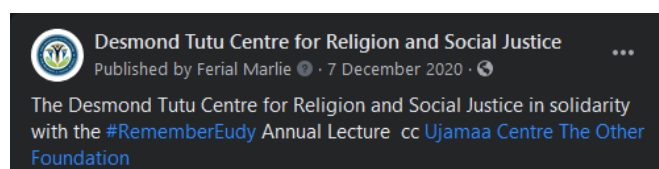
The discussion aimed to initiate a conversation to explore a variety of themes including the link between the domination of women and nature by men, environmental care tasks as women's work, anthropocentrism and androcentrism, and students as advocates of gender equality and climate change.

Two further initiatives were implemented after this conversation, 1) the Anglican Church of Southern Africa formed a 'Climate Change and Gender Task Team' which included two ASF affiliated students, 2) Rhine was selected by Green Anglicans to attend a global digital learning event called *People and Planet: Gender, Environment and Climate* under the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda.

## #RememberEudy Campaign (Partnership with Ujamaa Centre, UKZN)

**Online: Facebook, 7 December 2020**

The DTCSRJ collaborated with the Ujamaa Centre at UKZN to commemorate the annual Eudy Simelane Memorial lecture which took place on 7 December 2020. Eudy Simelane was a South African footballer who played for South Africa women's national football team and an LGBT-rights activist. She was raped and murdered in her hometown of KwaThema, Springs, Gauteng. The Centre participated in a social media campaign by donning t-shirts, reflecting the campaign and reposting the hashtag #RememberEudy.



From left: Ashleigh Petersen, Sakeenah Dramat and Nobesuthu Tom

## Anglican Communion Campaign: Advocacy and Gender Justice for 16 Days of Activism

Online: Zoom, 10 December 2020

The Gender and Religion thematic focus area intentionally directs much of the scholarship produced to an engagement with partners outside of the academy, in order to contribute to initiatives and policies that support gender justice. As such on 10 December 2020 Masters student, Rhine Koloti participated in the Anglican Communion's 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, as a panellist in the Advocacy and Gender Justice online webinar. The panel was moderated by Jillian Abballe (USA) and included other panellists, Amal Sarah (Pakistan) and Ruihana Paenga (New Zealand).



Rhine presented a brief yet provocative presentation diagnosing the Anglican Church's challenge concerning gender justice. He argued that despite the apparent and master narrative of a church that embraces gender justice through inclusive synod resolutions, policies and charters, gender intolerance, particularly that which promotes women leadership in the episcopacy, is still on the rise. He ended by highlighting some of the work done by his fellow colleagues and mentors in the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice as examples of how intentional gender justice is pursued in a space such as a research centre.



## International Partnerships

### Extraordinary Professors

In August 2020 the DTCRSJ motivated for the appointment of four extraordinary professors. These colleagues have an established relationship with UWC in general and the Centre in particular, and their appointments serve to galvanize these relationships in order to enhance what are already mutually fruitful partnerships. Students at the Centre interviewed each of the newly appointed extraordinary professors.

**Rosalind I.J. Hackett** is Chancellor's Professor, Professor of Religious Studies, Adjunct



Professor in Anthropology, and former Distinguished Professor in the Humanities, at the University of Tennessee, USA. She studied in the UK (Leeds, London, Aberdeen) and went on to teach and conduct field research in Nigeria. She has held fellowships at Harvard University and the universities of Notre Dame, Cape Town, and Groningen. She publishes in the areas of indigenous religions, new religious movements, gender, art, human rights, pluralism, media, and conflict in relation to religion in Africa. She is currently conducting research on sound and religion. Recent (co-edited) books are *New Media and Religious*

*Transformations in Africa* (2015) and *The Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism* (2015). She is Past President and Honorary Life Member of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) and was Vice President of the International Council on Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH). She also serves on the Board of Directors of the African Consortium on Law and Religion Studies (ACLARS). In 2019, Professor Hackett received an Honorary Chieftaincy title, Yeye Meye (Mother Who Knows Our Ways) from the Elerinmo of Erinmoland, HRM Oba (Dr) Michael Odunayo Ajayi, Osun State, Nigeria.

### Interview:

#### Describe your “connection” to the work and researchers of the DTCRSJ

My connections to the work of DTCRSJ are fourfold: 1) Religion and media, in particular the political economy of religious broadcasting in Africa; 2) Religion and gender in Africa; women's agency in African-initiated churches and Pentecostal-charismatic movements; coedited special issue of African Journal of Gender and Religion (AJGR) with Dr. Lee-Shae Scharnick-Udemans on media (2019); 3) Human rights, notably cultural and religious rights in relation to minority religious communities, such as indigenous religions and new religious movements and 4) religiously-related conflict in Africa, particularly over the regulation of religious diversity.

#### What are your current research, teaching and academic service projects?

I have several writing projects that pertain to my **research** on sound and religion, including a co-edited book, *Religious Sounds: Senses, Media and Power Beyond the Global North*. I am also pursuing research projects on the festivalization of religion in Africa and its consequences

for religious pluralism. Furthermore, I have joined forces with two Zimbabwean colleagues to produce an edited volume on Rastafarianism in Africa. As for **teaching**, I regularly teach undergraduate courses in African Religions, Anthropology of Religion, and Comparison of World Religions at my home institution. This spring, I will be teaching a new course, Religion and Nonprofit Leadership, and organizing a public symposium in conjunction with this new concentration. In terms of **academic service**, at the University of Tennessee, I was active for several years on the advisory board of Africana Studies and currently have the status of affiliated faculty in the Disasters, Displacement, and Human Rights Program in the Department of Anthropology. More widely, I serve on the Board of the African Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ACLARS) and have helped organize their annual conferences in various African countries since 2013. After twenty years in the leadership of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), as well as the IAHR Women Scholars Network, the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) and the North American Association for the Study of Religions (NAASR), I now serve in an advisory role. I was named to the Academic Council of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, Washington, DC in 2011. I also work to promote and defend the Humanities on an international level, particularly in my role as Vice President of the International Council on Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH) (2014-2020) and as delegate of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) to the Union of International Academies (UIA) (2020-23).

#### How do you plan to use your new position to enhance research, teaching, and academic service between the Centre and your networks?

Above all, in my new capacity at UWC, I am keen to learn more about the goals of the Centre and the teaching, learning, research and outreach activities of the staff and students. In that regard, I can be a resource and a conduit for DTCRSJ as appropriate, linking UWC students and colleagues to relevant international academic networks, associations, colleagues, resources, and institutions. By the same token, as a senior scholar with extensive teaching, research, and service experience in diverse settings, I look forward to dialogue, and possibly collaboration, with colleagues and students on new forms of public religion and debates over religious diversity, scholarly activism in response to social injustice, changing practices and ethics of fieldwork, and the future of higher education in an era of neoliberalism.

#### In what way (s) do you feel your research examines the intersections of and overlaps between religion and social justice?

I consider that my work demonstrates the pressing need to examine the full spectrum of religion's agency and potency using a range of critical, comparative, and contextual approaches. Many have written on the "ambivalence of the sacred." My interests have focused on the entanglements of religion and the state in various African contexts, either in the form of the politics of the regulation and registration of religious groups or their access to media organizations. Not surprisingly, it is minority and indigenous religions that frequently lack public recognition. I have also recently explored how female founders and leaders of African new religious communities have appropriated rights talk in their discourses. In northern Uganda, where I have worked since 2004, I set up the UT Gulu Study and Service Abroad Program (2011-2014) with a colleague in anthropology, to introduce US students to the dynamics of a war-affected region and to promote collaboration with local NGOs and

initiatives, notably the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, the Gulu Peace Garden Project, and the Lwo Folktales Project. In addition to short essays on the religious dimensions of the conflict/post-conflict setting in northern Uganda, I have latterly completed an article on “The Soundscape of War and Displacement in Northern Uganda.” I continue to conduct research on the relation between religion and social suffering in the region.

### **What advice can you offer post-graduate students and emerging scholars?**

The contemporary study of religion takes us beyond beliefs and doctrines into what people do and the religious/spiritual worlds they create and inhabit. These worlds constitute a response to the wider society, whether in terms of acceptance, rejection or transformation. They provide the symbolic resources and agentive power for individuals and communities to mitigate social suffering and effect human flourishing, just as they may legitimate structural inequalities. It is precisely these paradoxes and potencies of the phenomenon of religion that call for robust

humanistic and social scientific inquiry in postcolonial Africa. Students and future scholars of religion must be prepared to articulate the critical, transdisciplinary, and intersectional potential of their field of study. They need to have the theoretical and methodological skills to analyze the discursive moves both in society and academe to valorize particular religious formations or discount (indigenous) religious traditions as cultural heritage. But they also need to be aware of prophetic voices and interreligious initiatives, past and present, to generate peace and speak truth to power. In sum, there is no better time to be studying religion in all its complexities whether at the local, regional, national or global levels!

### **Closing remarks**

My appointment as Extraordinary Professor will allow me to assist with the international connectivity and profile of the Centre, but it will also serve to symbiotically deepen and broaden my ties to the South African academic scene. I have had the privilege of visiting South Africa on a number of occasions since 1997. I attended the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Cape Town in 1999 and helped organize the first ever World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) in Africa, in Durban, 2000. 2014 was a bumper year in that I presented at the second conference of the African Consortium on Law and Religion Studies (ACLARS) in Stellenbosch, at the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) in Cape Town, and enjoyed a one-month stint as an A. W. Mellon Fellow in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town. I have served on numerous occasions as an external examiner to several South African universities. I look forward greatly to the new opportunities for research and teaching collaboration that this professorship will afford.

**Evelyn L. Parker** is the Susanna Wesley Centennial Professor of Practical Theology at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. She joined the faculty in July 1998. Parker received the Bachelor of Science from Lambuth College, Jackson, Tennessee, in 1974, and the Master of Science from Prairie View A&M University in 1983. Upon receiving her M.S. she served as a research scientist in the department of Human Biological Chemistry and Genetics at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. She attended the two-week Christian Educators Seminar at Perkins School of Theology from 1986 until 1989 and received a Certificate as an Associate in Christian Education in June 1989. The seminars were the impetus for further study in theological education and the transition from a vocation in biological research to one in educational ministry. During the fall of 1989 she became a full-time student at Perkins receiving the Master of Religious Education in 1991. In December 1996 Evelyn earned her Ph.D. from the Joint Program of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary/Northwestern University in Religious and Theological Studies, with an interdisciplinary emphasis in Christian Education, Womanist approaches to religion and society, and education and public policy. While at Garrett Seminary/Northwestern University, she was a Fund for Theological Education Black Doctoral Scholar from 1993-1995.



### Interview:

#### Describe your “connection” to the work and researchers of the DTCRSJ

I have known Professor Nadar for about 25 years through her publications and lectures, as colleagues in the AAR/SBL, our mutual affiliation with the WCC, and her work with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. She graciously accepted my invitation to serve on a Womanist Approaches to Religion and Society panel and to lecture to my students during immersions to South Africa. Her leadership in the Centre was the perfect opportunity to seek her endorsement for the Centre to host my Fulbright Scholar research during the July 2019 – January 2020 period. Professor Nadar and members of the DTCRSJ provided a hospitable space for provocative discussions of my research topic on the role of religious leaders in the intervention and prevention of youth dating violence.

#### What are your current research, teaching and academic service projects?

As with my Fulbright research, I continue to focus on the Centre’s thematic area of Religion and Gender. Specifically, I am doing a parallel study of the role of religious leaders in intervention and prevention of youth dating violence in the USA. The research in both South Africa and the USA will result in a book on best practices for religious leaders. I am also preparing for another research project that examines aspects of religion and the health of 15 – 25-year-old young people.

I was invited to teach UWC – BTh students in the preaching and Christian ministry courses both in 2019 and September 2020. I focused my five sessions in the Christian ministry module on white supremacy and patriarchy. While a bit surprised about the focus of the module, students willingly engaged the reading assignments and conversations with a view toward practical implications in their religious institutions.



**How do you plan to use your new position to enhance research, teaching, and academic service between the Centre and your networks?**

I will serve the DTCRSJ and greater UWC community primarily by seeking funding (grants) to support the vision, mission, and foci of the Centre. I have gained experience with obtaining and managing grants for research and intend to use that experience for the benefit of the Centre. I monitor grants from various organizations through a subscription with a grants for NGOs website.

Also, I have a number of relationships that include the Fulbright Scholars Program, the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, as a founding member of the Board of the Daughters of the African Atlantic, President of the Society for the Study of Black Religion, and past President of the Association of Practical Theology. These organizations and my connections with them can benefit the vision, mission and foci of the DTCRSJ.

**In what way (s) do you feel your research examines the intersections of and overlaps between religion and social justice?**

My research on gender-based violence among youth is within the scope of the Centre's Religion and Gender focus. As mentioned above, I am also preparing for another research project that examines aspects of religion and the health of 15 – 25 year old young people. This project follows my publication, "Race, Religion and Health among African Descended Young Women" (2016). This novel project is transdisciplinary and with address health policy for youth and young women specifically.

Also, the Covid-19 Pandemic has revealed new disparities and injustices for African descended people that begs investigation, particularly related to young women and girls. I most recently developed and convened a conference for Historical Black Methodist Clergy in the USA and healthcare professionals for a conversation on the Covid-19 virus. The 90-minute event revealed questions that I will explore regarding the intersections of healthcare, healthcare professionals, African descended people, religious belief, and religious leadership. This conference was the first of such conversations that I will develop but broaden to a global participation/audience. My relationship with the WCC and their help to connect with the World Health Organization will help me with this research.

**What advice can you offer post-graduate students and emerging scholars?**

The best advice that I can offer post-graduate students and emerging scholars is to hone your questions so that they not only produce the desired publications and degrees that you seek but think of questions to examine that help people thrive and flourish. Develop questions to explore for the greater good or all humankind.

**Mika Vähäkangas** was born in Finland. He holds a doctoral degree in Theology and Masters degrees in both Theology and African Studies, from Helsinki University, Finland. He was also a student at Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, and Makumira, Tanzania, where he later served as a lecturer in systematic theology. He has also taught Systematic Theology and Mission Studies at Helsinki University and he is currently Professor in Mission Studies and Ecumenics at Lund University (Sweden) since 2009. Vähäkangas served the International Association for Mission Studies as vice president between 2008-2012 and as president from 2012-2016. He is an adviser to the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) and consultant to the Lutheran World Federation. In terms of research, he began by studying the relationship between Ujamaa (Tanzanian socialism) and Lutheran theology for his MTh and continued with a ThD analysing Tanzanian-born Catholic professor Charles Nyamiti's way of connecting Catholic scholastic traditions with African cultures. These were textual studies. While teaching in Tanzania, he was gradually attracted by empirical studies and today he attempts to balance between textual analyses, empirical research and constructive theology. He has started applying what he has learned in Africa on European religious realities.



#### Interview:

#### Describe your “connection” to the work and researchers of the DTCRSJ

I have been in contact with the Centre practically from its very inauguration, with the relationship gradually intensifying. This is partly due to the fact that I am connected institutionally to the Centre through professorial sibblingship. My Chair and the Desmond Tutu Chair are both donated by the same organization, the Lund Mission Society. Another reason for increasing level of cooperation is that I feel connected both to the way and contents of research and teaching at the Centre as well as theology and religious studies at the UWC at large. I have always related to the Centre staff and their approaches. Additionally, I have a family connection to Cape Town, which adds to mixture.

#### What are your current research, teaching and academic service projects?

In my latest book *Context, Plurality, and Truth* (2020), I sketch ways in which Christian theology should adjust itself to the end of the colonial/cultural imperialist/classicist era in which only a narrow selection of Christian traditions served as the yardstick. An impetus to these reflections has been acquainting myself to the Kimbanguist Church in Sweden and the DRC. All this is a continuation to my attempts to build methodological connections between theology and social/cultural anthropology (*Faith in African Christianity: Bridging Anthropological and Theological Perspectives*, edited with Karen Lauterbach, 2020). Yet another book in this cluster is the forthcoming one on contextual theologies edited with Sigurd Bergmann. My emerging area of research interest is to return back to where I began: the relationship between Christian theologising and politics, this time nationalism. I begin in Finland by studying the phenomenon in the grassroots but wish to expand the work to other countries, too.

**How do you plan to use your new position to enhance research, teaching, and academic service between the Centre and your networks?**

An official position at the UWC makes it possible for me to take responsibility in advising the Centre students – be they at MTh or PhD level. It also makes it smoother to conduct joint research-related activities in cases when having two universities is not an advantage. I wish to bring in my insights and contribution in between empirical and textual studies as well as constructive theology on one hand, and theology and social/political sciences on the other hand. Additionally, I want to use my position in between Europe and Africa to build connections and mutual enrichment.

**In what way (s) do you feel your research examines the intersections of and overlaps between religion and social justice?**

All my research has been on Christianity or relationships between Christianity and other faith traditions. The great majority of it has dealt with Africa. The backdrop of my research is always the question of justice – in relation to (neo)colonialism, cultural imperialism, political power, and hierarchies. For me it is important to argue for a form of Christianity that is internally just, inclusive and tolerant as well as working for these values in the wider society.

**What advice can you offer post-graduate students and emerging scholars?**

Concentrate on what you perceive as meaningful and personally important. In doing this, challenge your preconceived ideas and play the devil's advocate against your dearest ideas and values. In this manner, you will contribute to the development of knowledge and argumentation in your area of interest. Life is complex, and only propaganda is simple. Your task is to bring clarity to the complexities of life without turning the resulting knowledge into propaganda.

**Closing remarks**

DTCRSJ is a very special organisation where activism for social justice meets rigorous academic standards. I always approach the Centre with curiosity and will to learn more. Teaching and research are not a one-way road but interaction that changes both the society and us. We do not only do research, but our research does us.

**Adriaan van Klinken** currently resides in Leeds, UK but is originally from the Netherlands, where he studied Theology and Religious Studies at Utrecht University and completed his Masters in 2006, and PhD in 2011. During his Masters, he spent three months as a visiting student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and ended up writing his thesis there, so his connection to South Africa began at an early stage of his academic journey, and has developed through many return visits later. After completing his PhD, he moved to the United Kingdom, where he was first a postdoctoral research fellow at SOAS University of London, and in 2013 was appointed at the University of Leeds. At Leeds, his career began as a Lecturer in African Christianity, later becoming Associate Professor in Religion and African Studies, and since 2020 full professor. He also serves as director of the Leeds University Centre for African Studies, and of the Centre for Religion and Public Life.



### Interview:

#### Describe your “connection” to the work and researchers of the DTCRSJ

I have a long-standing connection to South Africa. In fact, I first met the DTCRSJ Director, Professor Sarojini Nadar, when I was a visiting student at UKZN where she was a lecturer at the time, back in 2006. I have stayed in touch with her ever since, and we have collaborated on quite a few projects. Our personal friendship and professional relationship developed into an official collaboration between the DTCRSJ and the Centre for Religion and Public Life at Leeds, with a Memorandum of Understanding in place since 2019, which I’m very excited about. In recent years, I have come to know many of the researchers and students in the DTCRSJ. It has been such a privilege to learn about the critical, important and transformative work taking place in the Centre, and now to be associated with the Centre!

#### What are your current research, teaching and academic service projects?

Much of my recent research has focused on Christianity and LGBTQ communities in East Africa. This culminated in my book [\*Kenyan, Christian, Queer\*](#) about the creative engagement with religion in LGBTQ activism in Kenya, which was published in 2019. Currently I’m completing another book, *Sacred Queer Stories*, co-authored with my Leeds colleague Professor Johanna Stiebert; it is based on a project where we worked with Ugandan LGBTQ refugees, creatively using bible stories to narrate and signify their life experiences. I’m also finishing a book with another longstanding collaborator, Professor Ezra Chitando from the University of Zimbabwe, titled *Reimagining Christianity and Sexual Diversity in Africa*.

Having worked on LGBTQ issues for a while, I’m currently developing a new area of research, about the way in which African literary writing represents, critiques and reimagines popular forms of Christianity on the continent. I love reading novels, so why not making it part of my work?!

My teaching at Leeds is quite closely connected to my research interests and activity, which enables a great cross-fertilisation. So does my involvement in the two just-mentioned research centres at Leeds, which are stimulating platforms for interdisciplinary collaboration.



### How do you plan to use your new position to enhance research, teaching, and academic service between the Centre and your networks?

I hope that the already existing collaboration between the Desmond Tutu Centre and the Leeds Centre for Religion and Public Life will be strengthened by my appointment in the Centre. Part of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two centres concerns collaboration in terms of postgraduate student supervision and exchange. I would very much welcome students from Cape Town to spend time as visiting students in Leeds, and vice versa, and am happy to facilitate that where I can. In fact we've already made some beginning with that last year. I've also attended and contributed to some of the postgraduate cohort workshops in the Centre, and have been impressed by the collaborative model of supervision. I hope to be able to contribute more to this in the future, and possibly also to co-supervise students in the Centre with projects adjacent to my expertise. I already have collaborated extensively with Professor Nadar on research and publishing projects in the past, and am also in conversation with Dr Jodamus, Dr Robertson and Dr Scharnick-Udemans with whom I have shared research interests. I'm excited to further develop these opportunities for research collaboration, also including colleagues in other parts of the continent that I work with.

### In what way (s) do you feel your research examines the intersections of and overlaps between religion and social justice?

The underlying question in much, if not all of my research is how religion is part of processes of progressive social change, sometimes as a hindrance, sometimes as a resource, and often these two are combined in complex ways. My research has engaged with issues of HIV/AIDS, gender, sexuality, and more recently ecology, the common thread being an interest in, commitment to, social justice in each of these areas. Where some colleagues focus on developing constructive projects that articulate theological visions for "another world possible", my work tends to be empirically based – taking it's starting point in what specific religious communities actually do, and how particular religious discourses, beliefs and practices operate. Doing so, I tend to foreground relatively marginal perspectives, in order to debunk and challenge monolithic narratives. For instance, in my book *Kenyan Christian Queer*, I present an ethnographic case study of a Nairobi-based LGBTQ church. Yes, this church is small and numerically it may be insignificant. But its very existence counters the idea that Kenyan Christianity is inherently homophobic. It presents an alternative possibility, a space of hope.

### What advice can you offer post-graduate students and emerging scholars?

It's only ten years ago that I completed my PhD thesis, and sometimes I still feel like an 'emerging scholar' myself (although recognising that I have the privilege of being in a secure academic position). I think the most important advice is to stay close to your passion. Academia shapes you in a certain way – it makes you think, talk and write in a certain way – which is fine, it's part of the training. But you can only stay motivated – or at least, I can – when you work on issues that you really care about, and when you develop your own style and voice rather than try to mirror others. This has taken me a while, honestly, and it still is a journey.

### **Closing remarks**

The only thing I want to add is a big thank you for welcoming me in the Centre. It's such a huge privilege to be associated with a vibrant and warm academic community that is truly committed to transformative scholarship of a high standard. I'm truly grateful for the opportunity, and I hope to make it worth it. The news of my appointment was one of the most exciting things to happen in a period that otherwise has been rather grim. I can't wait to visit and catch up with you all in Cape Town, when this global pandemic will finally allow us to.

## Public Scholarship Features

### American Religion Askew: An Experiment in Global Interpretation

Dr Megan Robertson participated in a collaborative experiment with Professor Hillary Kaell from McGill University. Robertson and five other contributors from around the globe including India, Turkey, South Korea, China and Singapore, used Kaell's book, "Christian Globalism at Home" as a conversation partner with which to engage in various themes. Robertson's piece titled, "The Production of Christian Globalism and the 'Church of Mandela'" compares the

THE PRODUCTION OF CHRISTIAN GLOBALISM AND 'THE CHURCH OF  
MANDELA' IN THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE  
MEGAN ROBERTSON



findings of her PhD work to Kaell's. In Kaell's summary of the project she encapsulates Robertson's contribution: "[Robertson] notes that organizations seen as progressive—sponsorship NGOs in my work or the 'Church of Mandela' in hers—can nevertheless use subtle forms of 'audit' to control the bodies of those they purport to support: foreign children and queer clergy, respectively. Institutional identities can, in Robertson's words, also 'function as umbrella ideals' that shade the gaps left by absence (children who drop out of sponsorship) or violence (policing queer clergy's bodies) to reassure sponsors or MCSA members that the institution is indeed fulfilling a Christian mission and driving social justice."

<https://american-religion.org/askewrobertson>

### Good Food Conversations with Biowatch

Pralini Naidoo, a PhD student in the Centre, participated in a podcast produced by Biowatch South Africa. The podcast series, "celebrates diversity in what we grow, cook, eat and store, and the diversity of voices passionate about good food that nourishes our bodies and our lives, as well as the web of life we share our gardens, fields, pastures and waters with." Naidoo is featured on Episode 5 and speaks about her research on tracking traditional seed in one of South Africa's immigrant communities. On the podcast she shares some of her insights on traditional food in the context of indenture.

<https://biowatch.org.za/good-food-conversations-with-biowatch>

## Academic and Professional Service

In addition to their duties at the Centre, staff also contributed to academic citizenship within, and beyond UWC in the year 2020.

### Sarojini Nadar

**Journal Editor**

**Editorial Board Member**

African Journal of Gender and Religion

- Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion
- Feminist Studies in Religion Book Series
- Journal of Africana Religions
- Women Studies International Forum

**Executive Member**

National Research Foundation (NRF) Executive Evaluations Committee

**Chairperson**

- NRF Rating Panels in the following disciplines - Law, Earth Sciences and Engineering, Communication, Media Studies, Library and Information Sciences
- UWC Senate Research Task Team (until 31 January 2021)
- Peer Review Panel for evaluations of journals in the discipline of Gender (Nominated by ASSAf's Committee on Scholarly Publishing and Council)

**Co-Chair**

**Steering Committee Member**

**Invited Expert**

American Academy of Religion: Religion and Sexuality Unit

American Academy of Religion: African Religions Unit

- Official COVID-19 Country Report (had to resign due to COVID related illness)
- Gender Advisory Group – World Council of Churches Inclusive and Affirming Ministries
- Faculty of Arts and Humanities Research Committee
- Faculty of Arts and Humanities Professorial Appointments Committee
- Joint Appointments and Promotions Committee of Senate and Council

**Board Member**

**Member of UWC**

**External Examiner**

University of Pretoria

### Lee Scharnick-Udemans:

**Co-Editor**

**Managing Editor**

**Media Officer and Reviewer**

**Selection Committee Member**

Journal for the Study of Religion

African Journal of Gender and Religion

African Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ACLARS)

Andrew W Mellon PhD Scholarship and Postdoctoral Fellowship Committee

**Selection Sub-Committee**

**Member and Co-Ordinator**

**External Examiner**

**Member of UWC**

National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS)

UKZN: Honours Modules and Theses and Masters Theses

- Faculty of Arts and Humanities Higher Degrees Committee Executive Member
- Faculty of Arts and Humanities Proposal Committee Member

### Megan Robertson:

**Co-Editor**

**Associate Editor**

**Reviewer**

Special Issue: Journal of Theology for Southern Africa

African Journal of Gender and Religion

- Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics
- Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa

**Steering Committee Member**

American Academy of Religion: Religion and Sexuality Unit



## Centre Outputs

### Publications

The following research outputs were published by core staff as well as research associates of the Centre. The far-reaching tragedy of Alease Brown's death, is even more deeply felt through the intellectual and political promise, that her four posthumous publications convey.

Chapters in Books
<b>Nadar, Sarojini</b> , "Sacred Sex, Sacred Text: Queering Religious Sexual Scripts in Transforming South African Societies", in <i>Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible</i> , ed. Susanne Scholz (Oxford University Press, 2020)
<b>Nadar, Sarojini</b> , and Reddy, Sarasvathie, "Embodied Epistemologies: Queering the Academic Empire", in <i>Vulnerability and Resilience: Body and Liberating Theologies</i> , ed. Jione Havea (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), pp. 187-98
<b>Jodamus, Johnathan</b> , "Intersectional Texture: Reconsidering Gender Critical Frameworks and Sociorhetorical Interpretation" in <i>Welcoming the Nations: International Sociorhetorical Explorations</i> , eds. Vernon K. Robbins and Roy R. Jeal (SBL Press, 2020)
<b>Naicker, Linda W</b> , "Sexuality, marriage and singleness among Indian Pentecostal Women in South Africa", in <i>Gender, Sexualities and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit</i> , ed. Chammah, J Kaunda (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)
<b>Brown, Alease</b> , "Jesus within the genres of the human. Reconciliation, Forgiveness and Violence" in <i>Africa: Biblical, pastoral and ethical perspectives</i> , eds. Nel, Marius J; Forster, Dion; Thesnaar, C. H. (Stellenbosch, SUN Press, 2020) 71-92
Articles in Peer-Reviewed Journals
<b>Nadar, Sarojini</b> , "Exploring Agency, Absence, and Approach in the Book, Kenyan, Christian, Queer.", <i>Religious Studies Review</i> 46.3 (2020): 333-335.
Seedat, Fatima and <b>Nadar, Sarojini</b> , "Between Boundaries, towards Decolonial Possibilities in a Feminist Classroom: Holding a Space between the Quran and the Bible.", <i>Journal of Religion and Theology</i> 27.3-4 (2020): 229-249.
<b>Scharnick-Udemans, Lee</b> , "Religion: The Final Frontier of the Rainbow Nation", <i>Journal of Religion and Theology</i> 27.3-4 (2020): 250-274
<b>Robertson, Megan</b> , "Queer Studies and Religion in Southern Africa: The Production of Queer Christian Subjects", <i>Religion Compass</i> , 15.1 (2020): 1 – 12.
<b>Jodamus, Johnathan</b> , "Redeeming Paul? Disruptive Masculinity, Sexual Autonomy, and Sexual Freedom in 1 Corinthians 7.", <i>African Journal of Gender and Religion</i> , 26.2, (2020): 1-16
<b>van Klinken, Adriaan</b> , "Religion in African literature: Representation, critique and imagination.", <i>Religion Compass</i> 14.12 (2020): 1-12.
<b>Brown, Alease</b> , "Re-imagining Sacred Texts: Recognizing the Ways in Which Protests, Tattoos, and Hashtags Constitute Vibrant Articulations of the Christian Faith", <i>Black Theology</i> , 18:1, (2020): 61-74
<b>Brown, Alease</b> , "Bleeding women and theology from below: How Mark's narrative of the indignity of the bleeding woman serves as a model of transgressive resistance for the "violent" contemporary South African Student Protest Movement.", <i>Stellenbosch Theological Journal</i> , 6(4), (2020): 13-36
<b>Brown, Alease</b> . "Honour Not Non-Violence Retrieving a Concept from the First-Century Context of Christian Marginalisation.", <i>Neotestamentica</i> 54.2, (2020): 209–222

## Book Reviews

**Robertson, Megan**, "Freedom of religion at stake: Competing claims among faith traditions, states, and persons", *Practical Matters Journal*, 13, (2020): x-xxx

**Robertson, Megan**, "Adriaan van Klinken, Kenyan, Christian, queer: Religion, lgbt activism, and arts of resistance in Africa", *Religious Studies Review*, 46 .3, (2020): 239

## African Journal of Gender and Religion



The 2020 edition of the African Journal of Gender and Religion invited authors to submit interdisciplinary articles that explored phenomena and trends emerging from the intersections of religion, theology, gender, and sexuality. To accommodate the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we adjusted our conventional publication timelines. Prospective articles were submitted to the AJGR until late November 2020. Articles were published on our open-access online platform on an ongoing basis as they became ready for publication.

We are enormously proud that despite the disruptions of 2020, and our initial low numbers of submissions, that we managed to publish a total of 10 articles for 2020! Below are the editorials for both the July and December issues, which provide an overview of the articles which were published.

AJGR Volume 26 No. 1 July 2020

Editorial by Sarojini Nadar:

What can we learn about the intersections of gender and religion from plays, films, medieval epics, poetry, and ancient biblical texts? A great deal, if the five articles in this issue of the journal are anything to go by. These articles offer in-depth analyses and profound insights about gendered relationships and the ways in which asymmetrical power is manifest in these various forms of media. Drawing on a range of inter-disciplinary methods, the articles in this issue invite us to consider how literature, film, poetry, and ancient texts act as a mirror for, and a window to religiously and culturally sanctioned gendered roles, behaviours, and attitudes.

In the first article, *From a Habit to a Husband: Representation of the Intersection between Religion and Masculinities in John Ruganda's Play, The Burdens* (1972), Danson Kahyana analyses the East-African play, "The Burdens" and looks at how the shifting roles of African masculinities are portrayed. Kahyana explores a range of gendered roles in the play through two ostensible archetypes of gender as embodied in the two main characters, "the virgin Mary" – Tinka, the ex-nun – and the "powerful husband" Wamala. The slippages of power that happen in the play, show that in the African popular culture, masculinities are "perpetually on trial."

Keeping with the idea of shifting and unstable gender roles, Elizabeth Olayiwola in her article, *Migration and the Feminization of Power: A Reading of Mike Bamiloye's Transnational Films*, explores how gendered relationships in marriage are framed in three Nollywood films, *The Return* (2014), *The Prodigal Ones* (2008), and *The Finest Wine* (2013). Filtering her analysis through Roberto Marinucci's theory of the feminisation of power, she shows how in these films, women become visible as economically empowered. Yet she laments that, despite the

filmmaker's willingness to "visibilise" the economically empowered women, he is at pains to keep women in their biblically sanctioned role of submissiveness in the home.

While women in the Nollywood films are given visibility in the previous article, Luis Josué Salés argues in *To Kill a Matriarchy: Makødda, Queen of Ethiopia and Specters of Pauline Androprimacy in the Kəbrä Nəgəşt*, that a major concern of the central section of this epic is “to erode the right to rule of women.” Through a careful reading of the legendary figure of Makødda through Pauline “androprimacy,” Salés shows how female power is neutralised. Salés concludes that “when scholarship does not replicate the androcentric and androprimal structures that already guide the Kəbrä Nəgəşt...new vantage points become possible, which in turn facilitate a more nuanced engagement with the text’s cultural and social fabric that questions patriarchal discourse and the narrative structures deployed to legitimate it by female erasure.”

Following on from the focus on Pauline influences, Gertrud Tönsing, in her article, *Victims of Compromise: Women and the Household Codes – Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:21-33*, makes a convincing case that women's leadership may have been sacrificed on the altar of early Christian unity. The Pauline "household codes" which seemingly pre-scribe submissive roles for women within the household, she argues, can be seen as a necessary compromise at the time, since the status of women in the early Christian church was contested. Therefore, Tönsing concludes, the codes should not be read "as static prescriptions for today, but as a dynamic mirror on early Christian conflicts."

The final article in this issue moves us from biblical text to personal narrative and poetic metaphor. Nicole Dickson, in the article, *The Midwife: A Narrative, Feminist Metaphor for Pastoral and Self-Care during Covid-19*, explores the metaphor of midwifery “as a statement of position for supporting pastoral and self-care during Covid-19 times.” Dickson argues that the metaphor of midwifery and specifically the imagery and discourse associated with it such as “expectancy,” “labour pains,” and “birth,” prove useful for making meaning of “Covid-19 (also called a pandemic) stories – stories of living in lockdown, of illness, of loss and grief, and of living in liminal spaces.” We are invited through this essay to consider the poetic power of a feminist metaphor in making meaning of religion during times of liminality, loss, and uncertainty.

AJGR Volume 26 No. 2 December 2020

Editorial by Sarojini Nadar:

2020 will be remembered as the year that brought the world to a standstill as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here in South Africa, it will also be remembered as the year that the president declared gender-based violence (GBV) to be a second pandemic. As a journal, we have long been committed to offering critical research that interrogates the links between religious belief systems and GBV. These belief systems are often propped up by interpretations of sacred texts that theorise gender roles as God-ordained, rather than socially constructed. Scholars who bring gender-critical theories to bear on sacred texts, have been challenging these interpretations through rigorous.



structured, and systematic analyses of texts that would otherwise be used in normative ways to circumscribe the power of women.

Two such scholars, in this issue – Johnathan Jodamus and Jeremy Punt – offer close and careful readings of biblical texts that challenge normative understandings of sex difference and heteronormativity within their selected texts. In his article, *Redeeming Paul? Disruptive Masculinity, Sexual Autonomy and Sexual Freedom in 1 Corinthians 7*, Jodamus invites us to consider the ways in which Paul, regularly accused of entrenching submissive roles for women, and upholding authoritarian roles for men, might through an alternative socio-rhetorical reading, subvert some traditional norms of masculinity. He is careful not to suggest that this reading of Paul can be attributed to all Pauline texts, by leaving the question of the redemption of Paul, from his ostensibly patriarchal tendencies, open.

Jeremy Punt, in his article, *An Apocalyptic Womb? The Great Harlot of Revelation 17-18* also invites us to possibly redeem the book of Revelation, which has regularly been noted as a violent text that legitimises social control over women's bodies, and argues that the Great Harlot has habitually received scholarly attention for her "sexual prowess." Punt demonstrates that the womb is a neglected and unacknowledged aspect of interpretation in apocalyptic scholarship. He asserts that, through a redemptive hermeneutic, the "life-producing womb" of the "Great Harlot" might be a site for reclaiming power, and invites the reader to reconsider the womb's apocalyptic significance.

While the biblical scholars struggled to free sacred texts from their heteronormative and misogynist shackles, the three other authors in this issue look beyond texts to aesthetics as a means to engage with the authoritarian heteronormativity and patriarchy within organised religion. In Ala Rabiha Alhourani's *Aesthetics and Ethics of Islam: The Art of Being a Gay Muslim*, the case for moving beyond the tired "debate of the compatibility of Islam with homosexuality" is made. The author invites us, instead, through an ethnography of a gay Muslim artist, to consider how gay Muslims make sense of their faith through aesthetic means, and puts forward the space of art as "a space that allows LGBTIQ Muslims to re-imagine a social reality and relationship beyond the authoritarian normative interpretations of Islam and the constraints of a prescribed social identity" – perhaps as a space of hope.

Selina Palm's article, *Sustaining Feminist Hope in Covid-19 Times of Despair and Anxiety* suggests that hope can be nurtured through the power of narratives, and through the nurturing of new habits. Drawing on the work of feminist theologian, Flora Keshgegian's five contours for new social habits of hoping in women's lives, Palm asserts that hope is to be found in the everyday embodied experiences of women, even when they are painful and raw. "Hope generating narratives...become[s] theological acts which can help us to lament, recognise limits, understand time differently, imagine creatively and seek good relationships with one another. It is not just the raw material onto which theology must then be crafted," says Palm.

In line with staying with the real and embodied, and moving away from abstract discourse and religious norms, S.N. Nyeck, in the article, *Poetics: Queer Recesses of the Heart and the Spirit of Intimacy with the Africana Household* invites us to consider the "steering power of poetics." In this article, Nyeck reads the Africana household through the poetics of Audre Lorde, all the while reminding us that "the personal is not just political, but it is spiritual." Nyeck suggests that "the exploration of poetry as a spiritual practice of the queered self...blurs the boundaries



between religion and politics, in order to offer an integral account of gender diversity within the Africana household.” In this article, that is itself poetically written, the poetic power of the Africana household that is non-dualistic, intimate, and “a reliable foundation for political solidarity,” is indeed manifest.

Overall, the essays in this issue collectively provide significant, creative, and innovative contributions to the field of gender and religion.

## Graduations

PhD Graduation: Megan Robertson (April 2020)

While we were not able to watch Megan walk the stage physically, we were massively proud of her being the first PhD student to graduate from the 2017 cohort of students. Her colleagues in the cohort refer to her in jest as the “first fruit.”



Megan's PhD thesis received resounding praise from all three of her examiners, especially for its theoretical sophistication and methodological rigour, with two leading international examiners recommending publication in prestigious presses. Below is her PhD citation:

Student: Megan Robertson

Supervisor: Prof Sarojini Nadar

Co-Supervisor: Dr Johnathan Jodamus

**Title of Thesis:** *Called and Queer: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Queer Clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*

As the first PhD thesis devoted to the study of queer clergy in South Africa, and Africa as a whole, this study makes an original and innovative contribution to the body of work on religion and sexuality. In her research, Megan Robertson focused on the lived experiences of clergy who identify variously as LGBT, in the ‘church of Mandela,’ the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Much of the existing work that exists on the subject shows Africa as a continent in which religion fuels homophobia. By focusing on the actual lived experiences of queer clergy, Robertson’s research tells a different and more complex story. This story goes beyond phobia to show how queer clergy negotiate multiple forms of power in their daily engagement with church and society. The originality of this study lies not just in its content but in its theoretical sophistication and methodological rigour. Megan Robertson has written what is sure to become a major reference work in the field.

Link to her full doctoral dissertation: [Called and Queer: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Queer Clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa](#)

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Anglican Church of Southern Africa – Call to Action on Gender Based Violence

#### GATVOL YET HOPEFUL! WOMEN CALL THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA TO ACTION

##### Preamble

Women are *gatvol* yet hopeful! Southern African, ordained and lay Anglican women and scholars of religion met to summon the church to action. The descriptive Afrikaans word 'Gatvol' means 'completely fed up and upset.' 'Gatvol' sums up the fatigue, despair, anger, anguish and pain we continue to experience physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually as women. But we are here - again - because the unstoppable love of God, the witness of Jesus the Christ who treated women as equals, the empowering force of the Holy Spirit, give us courage and compel us onward. Because of this we have hope, we have agency we have resilience.

We gathered to "consider, take counsel and speak out" (the closing words of the gruesome biblical narrative of Judges 19, the story of a woman who was gang raped) against gender based violence, *yet again*. We lament that we have to do so, *yet again*.

We acknowledge that there has been "speaking out" in the past, but we wish to interrogate why this "speaking out" has not been enough to curb the pandemic of violence against those gendered as women, by those gendered as men. The 2017 Mothers Union Diocese of Cape Town protest march, included a request for action, "We have marched and prayed but we need something more tangible than symbolic marches" the women said. On 3 June 2017 twelve representatives of different women's groups met with the Archbishop of Cape Town and appealed to him, "You declared apartheid evil and a sin, please declare gender-based violence to be evil and a sin as well." Today we declare that patriarchy is not just a sin, but a heresy.

The purpose of this statement is to call for a deeper consideration by the Church of the insidious links between gendered belief systems and violence; of the violence of patriarchy reflected in the absence, ignoring or minimising of women's voices in leadership, in promises made in synodical or other resolutions not followed up or not resulting in action, or broken promises.

The source of all gender-based violence is patriarchy. Patriarchy prevents us from seeing a faithful picture of who God is, in God's identity and in God's compassion. In the gender binaries the dominance of masculine language and masculine images of God, priest and church, renders theology and society poverty stricken. We yearn and strive for the kin-dom of God, where justice for women is restored! A new, beloved community where all humans are affirmed as image bearers of the living God.

We call the Church to condemn its death-dealing beliefs, doctrines, and practices

While there have been prior resolutions and strong statements issued by the Church in the past against GBV and the violence of patriarchy, these strong statements have sought to

locate the problem outside of the church's doctrines, teachings, beliefs and most importantly, practices.

There is substantial research and evidence to suggest that religious belief systems play a leading role in perpetuating dangerous conditions for women. We therefore call on the Church to speak out against these death-dealing beliefs and doctrines. We ask the Church to condemn all of its *own* teachings and practices that are less than life-giving for women. The following is not an exhaustive list, but some of the major areas which need challenge and redress:

1. **Male Headship** – We call on the church to denounce theologies of headship and “natural order” which suggest that men are by nature to have dominion and power over women. Male authority must be dismantled in all spheres – from the family to the pulpit. Therefore the church must avoid language like calling male priests ‘Father’ as it reflects a male clericalism which renders women priests ‘invisible’ in the presence of male colleagues who close ranks and insist on addressing one another as ‘father’. Liturgical language that reflects the images of God as gender-neutral should be encouraged and practiced.
2. **Female submission** – We call on the church to denounce theologies of submission, which require women to be submissive to men, to their husbands, and by extension other forms of male authority. The Church must intentionally address the transformation of previously male dominated ecclesial spaces by authorising and using teachings, liturgies and practices that are life-giving for women. The Church cannot continue to ordain women and expect them to practice ‘business as usual’ as if they were men. Women are tired – no *gatvol* – of conforming to patriarchal theologies and ecclesiastical practices and liturgies. Those who do confront these, often exit to follow their calling elsewhere, outside the ‘institutional’ church. Those who remain struggle to find ways to navigate their ministry within patriarchal norms and practices. Women need to be represented in all levels of church leadership, for effective action and transformation to curb the pandemic of GBV and the violence of patriarchy.
3. **Family Values** – We call on the church to denounce the recent call to return to “traditional family values” where power differentials are not acknowledged, and where the sanctity of family takes precedence over the sanctity of the lives of women and those who identify as LGBTQI+.
4. **Codes of Purity** – We call on the church to dismantle codes of purity. Teachings about modesty and purity which young women are expected to adhere to, promote rape culture and apportion blame to women for violence against their bodies. We condemn the ongoing practice of sanctions against women for “sexual impurity” while the men who are directly involved continue to enjoy pastoral care and impunity.
5. **Discourses of Powerlessness** – We call on the church to stop peddling discourses of powerlessness and vulnerability about women. Women are not *naturally* powerless and vulnerable – they are rendered powerless and vulnerable through the harmful and toxic theologies of the church. We call on the church to refrain from grouping women with children as a category. We recognise that the abuse of children is an important matter to address, but the continuous grouping of women with children reinforces the idea that women are minors.

6. Discourses of Protection – Women do not need to be protected. They need equal access to power; then they would not need protection from those who are given more power than them. The church needs to model equal access to power, material resources (including theological education and formation) and structural representation for women through the way in which it engages with women clergy and leaders. Since 1992 only two women have been consecrated to the Episcopate and that took twenty years after women's ordination; only four as Dean, Provost or Senior Priest. The number of women delegates at Provincial Synod has decreased since the Synods of 1992, 1996, 2002 and 2005. There were more women participating and leading in those synods because intentional steps were taken by the church leadership. While representation does not necessarily result in transformation, representation must remain a key commitment of the church. Without women in leadership in the church, without the perspective of women in decision making about the church, theology is insipid and fails to speak life and truth and value to women who are victims of toxic violent patriarchy in every form.
7. Discourses of Pity – We call on the church to stop perpetuating a discourse of pity and charity surrounding *our* women. When men speak of *our* women they perpetuate the idea of ownership of women and their bodies – this is at the heart of the problem of gender-based violence. Responding to gender based violence is an issue of justice, not of charity.

### Conclusion

In summary, beyond issuing statements of condemnation against GBV, or lack of women's leadership, the church needs to acknowledge its complicity in, and repent of, its own role in perpetuating gender-based violence. Our hope is in the Church of God that fully reflects the wondrous beauty and diversity of God who is beyond all genders and loves all creation fiercely. Consider this, take counsel, speak out and act!

SINETHEMBA!

Rev. René August  
Rev. Wilma Jakobsen  
Rev. Canon Dr. Vicentia Kgabe  
Canon Delene Mark  
Prof. Sarojini Nadar  
Dr. Miranda Pillay  
Rev. Natalie Simons-Arendse  
Ms. Pumla Titus



## Appendix 2: COVID-19 Psycho-Social Report



Counsellor name	Lynn-Joy Isaacs
HPCSA number	PRC0005509
Practice number	9990810000920134
Client(s)	Post-graduate Cohort The Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice University of the Western Cape
Time period reporting	01 September 2020 – 08 December 2020
Type of session	Online Group/Individual Counselling/Psychosocial Support
SECTION A: GROUP COUNSELLING/PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT	
Group Session 4: 30 July 2020, 19h00 – 20h15 (Google Meet)	
<p>Topic/Focus: General debriefing/psychosocial support (Covid-19)/Boundaries &amp; Communication</p> <p>Number of Clients: 1</p> <p>Resource Items: Psychoeducation worksheets for referral and home practice on <i>boundaries</i> and <i>non-violent communication</i>. Sharing tools and approaches for effective communication.</p> <p>Summary: This ended up being an individual session for the Cohort Member who joined for the session.</p>	
Group Session 5: 20 August 2020, 19h00 – 20h15 (Google Meet)	
<p>Topic/Focus: General debriefing/psychosocial support (Covid-19)/Negative beliefs and thinking patterns</p> <p>Number of Clients: 3</p> <p>Resource Items: Psychoeducation worksheets for referral and home practice on <i>negative beliefs and thinking patterns</i>.</p> <p>Summary: This was a robust session with a lot of deep, personal disclosure and group support towards one another.</p>	

SECTION B: INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING/PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT
<p>Client 1</p> <p>Topic/Focus: Counselling/Psychosocial Support  Number of planned sessions: 4 - 6  Number of sessions attended during June-July 2020: 2  Number of sessions attended during Aug-Dec 2020: 5  Total number of sessions during contract with Client 1: 7</p> <p>Summary: This Cohort Member, referred to as Client 1, continued with individual and group virtual/online counselling/psychosocial support sessions.</p> <p>Client 1 expressed her appreciation of the sessions. There appeared to be a lot of growth and change taking place in Client 1's life which she could share and discuss in these sessions.</p>
<p>At this stage, the individual is not in any imminent danger or presenting as a danger to anyone else.</p> <p><u>Need to break confidentiality:</u> No  <u>Further referral for Client 1:</u> No  <u>Outcome:</u> N/A  <u>Further actions:</u> N/A</p>
<p>Client 2</p> <p>Topic/Focus: Counselling/Psychosocial Support  Number of planned sessions: 4 - 6  Number of sessions attended during June-July 2020: 2  Number of sessions attended during Aug-Dec 2020: 5  Total number of sessions during contract with Client 2: 7</p> <p>Summary: A Cohort Member, referred to as Client 2, continued with individual sessions as Client 2 felt the need for obtaining psychological and psychosocial support. A further five virtual sessions were attended by Client 2.</p> <p><u>Need to break confidentiality:</u> Yes  <u>Further referral for Client 2:</u> Yes  <u>Outcome:</u> Successful, partially resolved due to Client 2's personal circumstances and ability to commit to the process.  <u>Further actions:</u> Continued communication between counsellor and Client 2 (not related to the commitment or the responsibility of the DTC Team).</p>

<p>Client 3</p> <p>Topic/Focus: Counselling/Psychosocial Support</p> <p>Number of planned sessions: 0</p> <p>Number of sessions attended during June-July 2020: 0</p> <p>Number of sessions attended during Aug-Dec 2020: 2</p> <p>Total number of sessions during contract with Client 3: 2</p> <p>Summary: A Cohort Member, referred to as Client 3, joined the group sessions and came into two individual virtual/online counselling/psychosocial support sessions.</p> <p>Client 3 shared that the online support sessions were of immense support as Client 3 was going through an extremely challenging time in life.</p> <p><u>Need to break confidentiality:</u> No</p> <p><u>Further referral for Client 1:</u> No</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u> N/A</p> <p><u>Further actions:</u> N/A</p>	
<p>Observations, immediate thoughts, and recommendations</p>	<p>Out of the group sessions, there were three (3) individuals who requested individual counselling/psycho-social support.</p> <p>Initially, ten group sessions were planned – of which, five took place. Due preparation was done for the group sessions even when individuals did not come to the online group sessions.</p> <p>In the instances of high-risk situations, it is essential to have a method of reporting and referral – this happened really smoothly between the DTC Team and myself. Communication was treated as urgent and in the cases where a Client needed to be referred for additional therapeutic support, the correct processes were followed.</p>
	<p>As the entire Cohort was online for their sessions relating to their studies during the 2020 due to Covid-19, I sensed that additional online/virtual screen time for psychosocial and debriefing support was burdensome for some. In addition, the cohort members have a host of other deadlines and family responsibilities and so, perhaps making time for this was a challenge for some. However, my sense is that those who needed to access the support were able to do so and utilise the space in a way that served them. Cohort members who were unable to make it or decided to not continue with the group sessions communicated effectively in advance.</p> <p>There were a few some students whose mental health suffered quite drastically during COVID-19. As it was, some who came for individual counselling already had existing personal and family challenges and the circumstances of 2020 seemed to exacerbate them. It was incredible to see the personal commitment of the few individuals who accessed the individual counselling support and to witness how it appeared to benefit them.</p>

Conclusion	<p>The way in which the DTC Team extended their resources to provide this kind of support is incredible. To have this kind of sensitivity toward their students was truly inspiring and encouraging. I can honestly say that while not everyone took advantage of the available support; those who did really benefited from it and I trust that the period of support will continue to have its effect as they continue with their work.</p> <p>I thoroughly enjoyed providing this service to the DTC and would like to thank the DTC for this opportunity to assist and support individuals in an incredibly difficult and uncertain time.</p> <p>If ever there is a need for further counselling/psychosocial support or process work, please do not hesitate to reach out.</p> <p>With much appreciation,</p> <p>Lynn-Joy Isaacs</p>
Signature	