



# *Annual Report*

April 2023 - March 2024



'The people of Palestine have every right to struggle for their dignity and freedom.'

# *Gratitude*

*Evangelische Mission Weltweit (EMW), the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany, and the Desmond Tutu (SARChI) Chair in Religion and Social Justice that is jointly supported by the Lund Mission Society and the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Grant number: 118854).*



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## FOREWORD

Writing from the 'quaint' town of Cambridge in the UK on my first sabbatical since taking up the position of Director seven years ago, I am struck by how culturally Christian Cambridge is. It is a university town, steeped in various traditions and despite students not being very personally pious or religious (or so I am told), all the colleges here ritualistically and aesthetically bear the imprints of their Christian heritage. Whether it is through "university sermons" or Evensong, which is a daily or weekly choral service of Christian hymns and liturgy that occur in almost every one of the 33 college chapels, Cambridge is unmistakably culturally Christian. While some may assert that Cambridge has grown to embrace diversity and secular values, the echoes of its Christian past can be felt through these cultural practices and rituals.

This got me thinking again, about how despite maintaining this 'proud' religious heritage here, colonialists inflicted profound damage on African indigenous religions, denigrating and often erasing rich cultural and spiritual practices that had thrived for centuries. What traditions and cultural conventions might have influenced the way our universities are run, if indigenous practices were not stigmatised and ancestral heritages were not suppressed and erased?

Colonial powers did not just subjugate African societies by imposing Eurocentric values and religions, but desecrated sacred rituals and local knowledge. We are still feeling the effects of African indigenous epistemicide, made possible by the colonisation of both land and knowledge, and we are thankfully starting to address some of this through the decolonial movement.

*“What traditions and cultural conventions might have influenced the way our universities are run, if indigenous practices were not stigmatised and ancestral heritages were not suppressed and erased?”*

Even as we reflect on this, it is painfully clear that there is a long reach of the actions of the Empire into the present moment through the

genocide unfolding in Gaza. In this regard, a pivotal event that echoes the essence of our mission as a research centre, which focuses on the intricate intersections of social justice and religion, was held in November 2023. We hosted a webinar with Mitri Raheb, a renowned Palestinian theologian and scholar, who offered a profound exploration into the occupation of Palestine, particularly amidst the backdrop of the genocidal Gaza war.

This unplanned event on our annual calendar underscored our commitment to fostering social justice through research and action and was possibly the most significant event we hosted in 2023. Raheb offered crucial insights that framed the history of the violence within occupation and colonisation, underpinned, as he argued, by both the 'hardware' of the military might of the West, and the 'software' of theological beliefs supporting Jewish and Christian Zionism.

By examining the occupation of Palestine through the lenses of theological beliefs, Raheb invited us into a critical conversation that explored the intersections of historical narratives, social and cultural identities, and the quest for justice. Archbishop Tutu, whose name we bear in our work, emphatically declared what he saw in Palestine as "Apartheid!" Placing ourselves firmly within the Arch's prophetic tradition, [this webinar](#), based on decades of research by Raheb, highlighted the importance of transcending mainstream Christian Zionist perspectives, acknowledging the broader implications of geopolitical events, and championing the cause of global justice.



It also confirmed the importance of translating our research for social impact. In this annual report, I am therefore, particularly honoured to commend the efforts of our extraordinary Professor, Miranda Pillay, and PhD student, and now associate lecturer, Rhine 'Toby' Koloti on the critical pedagogical work they are engaged in within communities of faith. This report showcases the remarkable work they have each individually, and together done in conscientising faith communities about dismantling harmful theological beliefs and practices, through workshops and seminars. Their work, particularly in the realms of gender-based and other forms of intersectional violence, exemplifies the transformative power of research, education and advocacy.

*“I hope this report serves as a testament to the power of critical scholarship, courage, and compassion, and our persistent conviction that research can be a catalyst for lasting social transformation.”*

Equally inspiring are the successes of my esteemed colleague, Lee Scharnick Udemans, whose contributions has not only resonated at national and international conferences, but whose work was recognised through her promotion to the rank of Associate Professor, within the space of 6 years since her first appointment. Another remarkable achievement was that of Ferial Marlie, our administrator, who completed her Honours degree at the University of Cape Town a few short weeks before she gave birth to her baby daughter.

Amidst our successes, a challenge looms—access to funding. It is essential to secure an additional funder to support the work of the Centre, as we are only funded by one donor at present, despite forging several meaningful national and international partnerships. In this regard, I want to express my gratitude to our exceptional research fellows and extraordinary professors, whose dedication to advancing knowledge and inspiring the next generation of scholars helps to supplement the human resources we have in the Centre. The table below which reflects our research outputs in the reporting year showcases not only the richness and transdisciplinary nature of our work but the important contribution made by our research fellows and extraordinary professors as well.

	Gender & Sexuality	Media	Education & Epistemology	Race, Politics African Religion	Ecology & Economy
Journal Articles	8	1	1	1	4
Chapters in Books	6	1	2	2	2
Books					
Edited Books					
Book Reviews					
Public Scholarship/Op-Eds		1	7	6	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>

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Overall, as we navigate the often-disheartening complexities of our time, I hope this report serves as a testament to the power of critical scholarship, courage, and compassion, and our persistent conviction that research can be a catalyst for lasting social transformation.



**Sarojini Nadar, Director  
Wesley House, Cambridge  
7 March 2024**

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## Appointments

### Associate Lecturer, Mellon Talent Stewardship Grant



Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti has been appointed as an associate lecturer in the Centre as part of the Mellon Talent Stewardship Grant (MTSG) initiative. The MTSG is a grant earmarked for PhD students who have been identified as potential future academics and it allows the recipient to gain experience in teaching and research while pursuing advanced graduate studies.

In his capacity as an associate lecturer, Koloti will be expected to teach within the Department of Religion and Theology as well as actively participate in the research endeavours of the DTC.

### Research Fellow: Megan Robertson



Megan Robertson completed her PhD in 2020 and finished a postdoctoral term under the SARChI Chair in the Centre in 2021. She took up a position as a Senior Researcher in the Centre for a short while thereafter. In 2022, she was awarded one of the most prestigious European research awards, the Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship, to the value of almost R4 million for her two-year project "Sex and the Sacred: Queering Black Performing Arts in South Africa." The project which is hosted at the Centre for Religion and Public Life (CRPL), at the University of Leeds, forms part of the Centre's ongoing partnership with Professor Adriaan van Klinken, Director of the CRPL. Megan

visited South Africa in August 2023 as part of her work on this project, and presented at a seminar and facilitated a methodology workshop for the Centre.

### Extraordinary Professor: Miranda Pillay



Miranda worked in the Department of Religion and Theology as a Lecturer from January 2001 to December 2009, and as a Senior Lecturer from January 2010 until her retirement in January 2017. She is regarded as one of the foremost women theologians in the country, and her work is interdisciplinary, drawing from the fields of biblical studies, women's and gender studies and theology. Theoretically, her work is grounded within critical African feminist scholarship which foregrounds the intersectionality of the privilege/oppression dialectic. Most importantly, she builds relationships and communities of scholarly practice to connect academics and activists with shared interests and commitments towards

social justice. We were very pleased to therefore have Miranda join the Tutu Centre team not only as Extraordinary Professor, but as a contract replacement for Megan Robertson. Her work in the focus area of gender, religion and sexuality, makes a significant contribution to our ongoing work in this area, and this feels very much like a homecoming!



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## Postdoctoral Fellowship Appointments

### Selena Headley



Selena Headley's postdoc was funded by the Desmond Tutu SARChI (The South African Research Chairs Initiative) Chair in Religion and Social Justice. Selena is an Urban Training Collaborative Coordinator with Resonate Global Mission, focusing on developing local leaders through mentoring and urban training initiatives in the Eastern and Southern Africa region. She has extensive experience in community-based projects, higher education, and curriculum development. She served as a community development, sociology and theology lecturer at Cornerstone Institute in Cape Town assisting with the development of robust curricula for a higher certificate in Community Development and an Honours in Community Development. She has focused on projects and journeys involving the theological and spiritual formation of transformative leaders in Cape Town and across South Africa in association with The Centre for Faith and Community at The University of Pretoria and The Warehouse. Her research interests include Theological Education, Womanist and African Women's Theologies, and Urban Ministry. Since 2018 she has been an "Urban Africa 2050: Imagining theological education/formation for flourishing African cities" research project team member, exploring the theological education landscape connected to urban realities along with colleagues from 14 African cities. Her postdoc mentor is SarojiniNadar.

### Dane Isaacs



Dane Isaacs's postdoc scholarship was funded by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Dane holds a Masters and PhD in Psychology from the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University, respectively. His research interests include disability studies, specifically in the context of people who stutter. He also has an interest in the study of masculinities, particularly within the South African context, men's perpetration of intimate partner violence against women, and mental health. To date, Dane has co-authored two book chapters and published thirteen peer-reviewed articles in both local and international journals. He has presented his research at local as well as international conferences. He recently joined the Human Sciences Research Council. His postdoc mentor was Johnathan Jodamus.

### Mutale Mulenga Kaunda



Mutale Mulenga Kaunda's postdoc scholarship was funded by the Desmond Tutu SARChI (The South African Research Chairs Initiative) Chair in Religion and Social Justice. Kaunda obtained her PhD in 2017 from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), where she was also a research mentor and writing coach to master's and PhD students. Her job experiences include being a director of the MakeWay Circle Zambia on intersectional Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights of adolescents and youth with multiple vulnerabilities. She is also an adjunct scholar and researcher at the United Church of Zambia University. Her publications are focused on diverse topics of research at the intersections of culture, religion, gender and education of African women. She is a member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and a co-convener of the Scholarship and Public Theology Working group of the Pan African Women Ecumenical Empowerment Network. She is also a member of the Ecumenical Network of Global Advocates for Gender Justice (ENGAGJ) under the Just Community of Women and Men of the World Council of Churches. Her book: *Postcolonial Imbusa: Bemba Women's Agency and Indigenous Cultural Systems* published by Lanham Lexington Books, has just been published. Mutale's postdoc mentor was Sarojini Nadar.

## Visiting Professorship, King's College, London



Sarojini Nadar has been appointed as a visiting Professor at King's College, London, for a period of three years until 2025. She will use her time as a Visiting Professor to formalise the existing partnerships between the University of the Western Cape and King's College with a view to, among other things, establish and run a joint UWC-KCL cohort model of supervision programme for Masters and PhD students, to promote staff and student exchange across the institutions and, to develop joint seminars, conferences, research projects, and publications.

## Visiting Fellowship, Wesley House, Cambridge



Sarojini Nadar was appointed as a visiting fellow, Wesley House, Cambridge from January to December 2024. She is spending a year's sabbatical in Cambridge completing research for a monograph entitled "Troubling Texts of Terror(ism): Sexual violence and genocide in the book of Esther and Christian Zionist narratives". The proposal has passed through the first round of review at Routledge Press, and the monograph will be completed in 2024.

## Principal Investigator, Transformative Religion: Religion as Situated Knowledge in Processes of Social Transformation International Training Group

Lee Scharnick-Udemans has been appointed as a principal investigator in the "Transformative Religion: Religion as Situated Knowledge in Processes of Social Transformation International Training Group." The IRTG is a joint collaborative effort with the University of the Western Cape, Stellenbosch University, the University of Kwazulu-Natal, and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. This five-year project establishes and advances an ongoing "transdisciplinary and transcontinental research dialogue on religion as a resource and a site of social transformation". The project is conceptualised through four research areas which include; national identity, development, migration, and healing. In her capacity as a PI, Scharnick-Udemans will be expected to supervise PhD students, offer expert topical input, training in advanced research skills as well as participate as a full member of this robust research community and its activities. The research foci of the IRTG strongly resonate with the work of the DTC and we are certain that Scharnick-Udemans' new role will inspire a number of mutually enriching connections between the project and the Centre.

## Joint Committee, Higher Degrees and Research

In June 2023, the DTC joined the Department of Religion and Theology (DRT) in co-establishing a joint Higher Degrees Committee. The purpose of this committee is to ensure that important matters related to the intellectual project of the study of religion and theology are engaged through rigorous collective discussion and debate. The committee is responsible for, among other duties, vetting admissions, project registrations, supervisor and examiner nominations. The committee is underscored by a commitment to encouraging and enabling decision-making that enhances research excellence and is co-chaired by Lee Scharnick-Udemans from the DTC and Johnathan Jodamus of the DRT.

## Celebrations

### Ishaya Anthony, PhD Graduation

In June 2023, Ishaya Anthony, a joint PhD candidate associated with the UWC-Ghent SIP partnership, jointly supervised by Lee Scharnick-Udemans and Kris Rutten, successfully completed his public defence concluding the Belgian portion of the examination. Anthony was awarded his PhD by the University of the Western Cape during the Spring Graduation season. His thesis is entitled, “Public Pedagogy and the Socio-Political Economy of Religious Media: A Qualitative Study of the Advent Cable Network Nigeria (ACNN)”. The following citation provides a summary of his study:



Scholarly studies on the religious media landscape in Nigeria have predominantly given attention to the activities of Pentecostal Charismatic Churches. Ishaya Anthony’s thesis offers a fresh and exciting angle to the historiography of religion and media in Nigeria through addressing the intersections and imbrications that exist within the religion, media, and education triad in the context of the mediological endeavours of the Advent Cable Network Nigeria (ACNN). Underpinned by the concepts of mediatisation of religion, public pedagogy and literacy development, the project found that the work of the ACNN extends beyond its religio-theological scope to play an important role in reconstructing, representing, and contesting a myriad of socio-political issues in Nigeria.



We are delighted that Lee Scharnick-Udemans, Senior Researcher in the Centre, has graduated her first PhD student, and look forward to many more in the coming years. After obtaining his degree, Ishaya Anthony was awarded a scholarship to pursue the “Advanced Masters Program in Ecumenism” at the Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland. This is an important partnership between our Centre and the Institute, which is strategically aligned with the DTC’s vision to support progressive and rigorous theological education and research. Anthony took up this opportunity in September 2023. In addition, Anthony, has recently been appointed as a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Religion Studies at the University of Johannesburg. We are excited to continue supporting him as he embarks on this new phase of his career.

### Cameron Shabangu, Masters Graduation



Cameron Shabangu graduated on 15 September 2023 at the UWC Spring Graduation ceremonies. Shabangu’s thesis focuses on the ways in which Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic churches purport to be “multi-racial” but their ecclesial leadership remains dominated by whiteness as an organising construct. Shabangu has journeyed with the Tutu Centre postgraduate cohort since 2020, and we are delighted that he has completed his degree. Shabangu was supervised by Johnathan Jodamus, and he has just joined the 2024 Doctoral cohort. We are delighted to welcome Shabangu back.

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## Ferial Marlie, Honours Graduation (University of Cape Town)

Centre administrator, Ferial Marlie graduated with her Bachelor of Social Sciences (Honours) from the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Cape Town in March 2024. Working at the intersections of Islamic and Gender Studies, Marlie's research project is entitled "Exploring Muslim online discourses of gender justice: A case-study of Maulana Dawood Sampson's video".



Obtaining this degree was no small feat, as Marlie worked hard on her studies while pregnant with her third child, and we are very pleased to note that she and her family welcomed the new addition to their family on the 12th of December 2023.

Marlie has also registered for a Masters degree in the Women's and Gender Studies programme at UWC, and will pursue research under the auspices of the SARChI Chair in Religion and Social Justice, in the area of gender and religion.

## Promotion: Associate Professor: Lee Scharnick-Udemans

We are delighted to note that Lee Scharnick-Udemans was promoted to Associate Professor as of January 2024. Scharnick-Udemans was appointed as Senior Researcher in the Centre in 2018, and the progress she has made in her career in the short space of 6 years is nothing short of remarkable.

## Award: Senior Professor: Sarojini Nadar

Director, Sarojini Nadar, was awarded the Senior Professor rank as from January 2024. In addition, the Desmond Tutu South African Research Chair (SARChI) which she holds, was renewed and awarded at Tier 1 level for a further 5 years, starting January 2024.

## Sarojini Nadar, B2 National Research Foundation (NRF) Rating



We are pleased to report that Sarojini Nadar, was awarded a B2 NRF rating. This is an improvement on her previous B3 rating. As defined by the NRF, "B-rated scholars are researchers who enjoy considerable international recognition by their peers for the high quality and impact of their recent research outputs."



## *Religion, Gender, and Sexuality*

*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 woman and/or queer. Projects within this thematic focus 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, gender, and sexuality intersect. These include, but are not limited to: sexual and reproductive health rights, violence against women, sexuality, queer and trans identity and citizenship, women and leadership, and religious and cultural laws and tradition.*



## Graduate Research



**“Establishing Embodied Community Care Pathways for Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Trauma”**

**Leona Morgan**

**PhD Candidate final stages, jointly registered at the University of the Western Cape and the University of Ghent**

While sexual trauma is inherently an embodied experience, research on psychological interventions that is critically cognisant of geographic, religious and socio-political community contexts within which embodied, therapeutic interventions occur, remains limited. Decolonial, African and feminist community psychologies have called attention to this epistemic, ethical gap. The PhD study explores embodied care pathways for adult survivors of childhood sexual trauma with a generational history of sexual trauma in mainly working-class communities in Cape Town, South Africa. Framed within a critical feminist research paradigm, an in-depth description and critical analysis of the participatory action research methodology of the therapeutic encounter with 13 adult survivors who identify as female and 'Coloured', are given. The interdependence of communities, and centralising the body that is cognisant of both the social and spiritual space of belonging, were considered during all the phases of research, including research protocol development. Accounting for these multiple spaces of belonging and variations in age and intervention timelines, the researcher established embodied care pathways for trauma relief and integration.



**“Narratives of First-Generation (post nationhood) Caribbean Women in Domestic Care Services in the U.S.A: A Postcolonial Womanist Reading.”**

**Roxann Thompson**

**PhD Student**

**Pre-proposal phase**

Prompted by the memory of her mother’s story, Thompson’s project seeks to unmask domestic work performed by Caribbean women, beyond the transactional. Drawing on memory and materials of her transnational positionality, she leans on postcolonial and womanist theories to centralise the research around the lives of 20th-century Caribbean domestic workers.



**“Exploring the lived experiences of women bishops in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.”**

**Pam Delpert**

**PhD Candidate**

**Post proposal stage**

In 1986, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) witnessed its first women's ordination after 160 years. Since then, seven women have been elected as Bishops. Despite this progress, challenges persist for women in the ministry, as evidenced by reported instances of exclusion and discrimination. This study, using feminist perspectives, aims to delve into the experiences of women bishops within the MCSA, exploring the intersection of church doctrine, discipline, and their roles in leadership through ethnographic and narrative research involving six current and one former woman bishop.



**“Fleeing (to) God - A multimedia exploration of the faith journeys of African LGBTIQ+ religious leaders forced to flee their countries of origin due to queerphobia.”**

**Carl Collison**

**MA Student**

**Pre-proposal phase**

Collison's research explores the faith journeys of African LGBTIQ+ religious and traditional leaders who fled their home countries due to queerphobic violence or the threat thereof. This research will be based on a multimedia body of work he will produce - made up of documentary films, a photographic essay, text and audio documentaries - as well as interviews conducted with LGBTIQ+ religious and traditional leaders.



**“Queering Theological Anthropology: An exploration of Everyday Queer Theologies of queer visibility and liveability in the Anglican Church of Kenya”**

**Adera Godfrey Owino**

**PhD Student**

**Pre-proposal phase**

In Kenya, the criminalization of queer sexuality and the persistent and widespread stigma and discrimination against queer people result in exclusion, violence and even death. Owino's study explores how queer people within the church are (re)claiming and (re)inserting their belongingness in an Anglican church space in which their sexuality and gender identities are being exorcised and alienated through an institutional culture which privileges and glorifies heteropatriarchal framing of theological anthropology.



**“Spirituality, mental health, sexual and gender identity amongst Abathandazi in South Africa”**

**Nolwazi Nzama**

**PhD Student**

**Pre-proposal phase**

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of Abathandazi, and their sexual and gender identity within the South African context. The study is embedded in grounded theory and an ethnographic research design.

## Teaching

### Honours Research Essay: TST 701

*Department of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape*

TST 701 is a module offered in the Honours Programme of the Department of Religion and Theology. While all modules in the programme have a research component, TST 701 is geared towards developing research skills necessary for the next level of postgraduate studies. Miranda Pillay was appointed supervisor to student Felicia Rumble for the research topic, “The church and patriarchy: A reflection on theory and praxis”. Central to the argument made in the research essay is the “inseparable relationship between reflection and action” – a theme inspired by the work of South African feminist theologian, Denise Ackermann. Identifying some key themes relating to the synergy between theory and praxis, Rumble focused on possible shifts in church practices, using her own ecclesial social location within the Nazarene Church. We congratulate Rumble as she pursues further studies.

## ETH 321: Moral Discourse on Gender and Human Sexuality

*Department of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape*

This third-year ethics course was facilitated by Miranda Pillay, PhD candidate Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti, PhD candidate Ashleigh Petersen-Cloete, and Postdoctoral fellow Dane Isaacs, in the second semester of 2023, with Pillay assuming a coordinating function. The aim of the module is two-fold: to examine how moral discourses are formed around gender identity and sexual diversity and, to explain the ways in which these moral discourses are transformed by those who act with individual and collective ‘moral agency’ to “talk back” to the discursive production of sexual and gender norms. Emphasis is placed on the ways in which cultural and religious traditions shape and influence 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 gender and sexual norms. Framed within a strong feminist ethics approach which has both critical and constructive dimensions, the module focuses on lived experiences as they are represented in a selection of narrative case studies. Students are encouraged to look at positive sexuality from examples in music and the arts, as exhibited in the selected case studies.

### Community Engagement

#### Clergy School

*Houw Hoek Conference Centre, Grabouw, May 2023*

On 31 May 2023, Miranda Pillay, assisted by Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti, addressed the clergy of the Diocese of False Bay



(Anglican Church of Southern Africa) on the topic “Church and Gender Justice in the Context of Gender-based Violence”. The address took place in the context of the Diocesan annual Clergy School, held at Houw Hoek Conference Centre, Grabouw, Western Cape. Pillay presented an overview of the context, objectives, content, and outcomes of two (previously reported on) workshops held in Macassar and Lotus River, respectively. Highlighting the collective harvesting of possible proactive intervention strategies against gender-based violence and femicide, Pillay pointed out that a “mind-shift” through sermons was identified as a proactive intervention strategy by parishioners in the Diocese. She then spoke on the link between patriarchy and violence against

women and its impact on skewed gender power-relations in ancient biblical texts and contemporary contexts. Pillay illustrated how reading texts from a critical narrative-prophetic-ethical-feminist perspective, holds the potential for the liberative potential of a selected text to be illuminated. The clergy indicated their interest in attending a gender-based violence sermon writing workshop based on biblical texts for the three Sundays during the 16 Days of Activism for NO VIOLENCE against Women.

#### Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA)

*Noord Paarl, August 2023*

On 20 August 2023, Miranda Pillay delivered an address on the topic, “The Bible and legitimate presence of women: The story of Hagar” at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA) in Noord Paarl. The invitation to present on the church’s Women’s Month theme “The God who sees me,” came from the Pastor, Cynthia Davids, a former student of Pillay. Amplifying the counter-cultural aspects of the text, Pillay demonstrated how the intersectionality of race, class, ethnicity and gender impact women’s lives in the ancient text and how it may shape how women are perceived and treated in contemporary contexts.

## Sermon Notes Workshop: Anglican Church of Southern Africa

*Diocese of False Bay, September 2023*

On 19 September 2023, as a follow-up on the topic “Church and Gender Justice in the Context of Gender-based Violence” discussed with clergy of the Diocese of False Bay on 31 May 2023, Miranda Pillay and Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti presented a one-day workshop at the invitation of Hope Africa, The Social Development Programme of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. The workshop, “Developing Sermons Notes for 16- Days of Activism for NO VIOLENCE against Women”, was held at the local Anglican Church in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town. The aim was for clergy to co-create sermon notes based on selected biblical texts as indicated in the Common Lectionary for the three Sundays during the “16- Days of Activism for NO VIOLENCE against Women” (25 November -10 December). Data generated from small group discussions and hermeneutical insights gained from inputs by Pillay and Koloti equipped participants to write sermon notes and develop sermon outlines for their respective parish/ congregational contexts. Pillay and Koloti together with *Hope Africa*, plan to collect the different sermons, with a view of compiling and circulating these as a resource for use by other church communities.

## Sermon Notes Workshop: Clergy Day, Lesotho Durham Link Campsite

*Maseru, Lesotho. September 2023*



A “Sermon Notes Workshop” similar to the one conducted by Miranda Pillay and Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti on 19 September for the Anglican Diocese of False Bay, was held for clergy in the Anglican Diocese of Lesotho on 21 September 2023. Conducted by Koloti, the workshop was provocative and highlighted the many ways through which sacred texts are often complicit in maintaining male privilege through patriarchal religious discourses. This allowed the clergy an opportunity to consider how religion and culture form and/or transform discourses around gendered violence in and through biblical texts. At the end of the workshop, the clergy took a unanimous decision to look at how they could use the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence to develop and deliver sermons that focus on speaking against GBV.

## Gender-Based Violence & Femicide Workshop

*Diocese of False Bay, Caledon, January 2024*

On 27 January 2024, Koloti conducted a Gender-Based Violence & Femicide workshop, at the invitation of *Hope Africa*, a Non-Profit Company created as the Anglican Church’s response to poverty and inequality in society.





The workshop was held at St. Paul’s Anglican Community Hall in Caledon and was attended by over forty participants from the Diocese of False Bay, comprising religious leaders such as Lay Ministers and Sunday School teachers. Reflecting on a local case study, the workshop aimed to raise awareness of overt and covert ways that religion, class and culture maintain patriarchy by internalising male privilege. The workshop interrogated the biblical story of King David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:26-13a), using it as a moment to reflect on the many ways that sacred texts are used to internalise male privilege and normalise the abuse of women’s bodies and sexuality. Because this narrative also depicts the abuse of power by King David, the workshop concluded by

challenging the participants to re-imagine how religious leaders are also capable of abusing their power, through clergy sexual and other forms of abuse.

## Presentation of The Archbishop of Cape Town’s “Peace with Justice Award” to Chris Ahrends

*St Stephens Anglican Church, Pinelands, January 2024*

Miranda Pillay was invited to deliver an address at the “Peace with Justice Award” bestowed upon Chris Ahrends, who was Chaplain to Archbishop Desmond Tutu and founder of the Desmond Tutu Peace Trust, at a ceremony held at St Stephens Anglican Church, Pinelands, on 28 January 2024. Pillay spoke on “Patriarchy and Gender” as a social justice issue in and for the church. With reference to the call, “without justice, there can be no peace,” Pillay pointed to the contributions church leaders had made in challenging the culture of racism, justified by apartheid theology. Making the observation that patriarchy is said to be a “profoundly non-racial institution in South Africa”, Pillay argued that the pervasive patriarchal culture of the church perpetuates gender injustice. Pillay cautioned that rewarding an individual’s work on peace through justice could be perceived as a smokescreen for its own complicity in the manifestations of gender oppression, unless it deals more swiftly with cases of sexism and genderism within its own ranks. The ceremony was followed by informal conversations over a meal, which elicited hubs of meaningful discussions with Pillay on possible actions to transform the church’s patriarchal culture.

## Conferences, Seminars, and Workshops

### Workshop, “Church and violence against women”

*St Augustine’s Church, April 2023*

On 29 April 2023, Miranda Pillay facilitated a one-day workshop, “The Church and violence against women”, held in partnership with Hope Africa, an NGO responsible for the Social Development Programme of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. The workshop, attended by representatives of various organisations within churches from the False Bay Diocese of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, was held at St Augustine’s Church, Lotus River. The topic “violence against women” which includes femicide (GBVF), was contextualised as one of many manifestations of gender-based violence. Drawing on her research in this area, Pillay introduced the community to concepts such as dominant culture discourses. The workshop centred around three forms of violence for discussion (i)brute/ physical violence (ii)spiritual violence and (iii) structural violence. The workshop comprised four distinct (though interrelated) sections (1) an opportunity for participants to consider and reflect on their perceptions of GBVF and how they might have been shaped by cultural and religious beliefs and practice; (2) critical engagement with a case study exhibiting manifold manifestations of GBV as the lived-experience of a family; (3) identification of the conventional responses from churches; and (4) engagement with the systemic societal, political and ecclesial issues that could be

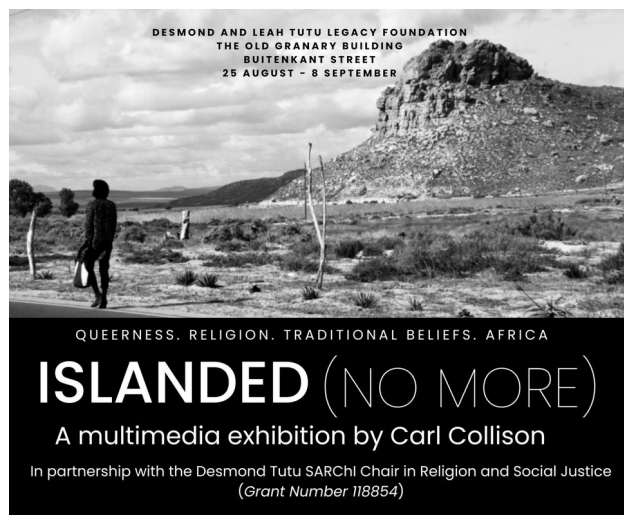


challenged/addressed, using resources within the their faith tradition. To this end, a ‘Gender-sensitizer Conversation Questionnaire’ was made available to participants who shared their views and perceptions in pairs. The workshop ended with participants exploring how the ‘church’ as a community might be able to change attitudes and behaviour justified by skewed gender power relations through bible studies, sermons, festivals etc. A particular emphasis was placed on patriarchally infused liturgies, policies, rules and laws that ‘sanctify’ the subjugation of women. Practical suggestions included the need to revisit Sunday School curricula, marriage preparation material, and the ways in which the Bible is used in sermons to justify patriarchal power.

## Annual Economies of Violence Event Multimedia Art Exhibition: "Islanded No More"

*The Old Granary, Cape Town CBD, August 2023*

Since 2017, the Centre has been expanding trans-disciplinary research that intersects activism and academia, through the commemoration of the anti-apartheid women’s march of August 1956 and the Marikana massacre of August 2012. The annual event is structured through the theoretical lens of “economies of violence.” On 31 August, The Desmond Tutu SARChI Chair in Religion & Social Justice, in partnership with The Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation hosted a Multimedia Art Exhibition as part of the annual commemoration. The exhibition was curated by Carl Collison, MA student in the Tutu Centre. Collison described the exhibition as follows:



*Islanded (No More) is a body of work I have been putting together over the past few years as a journalist and filmmaker covering the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ people across Africa. The exhibition focuses on the intersections between queerness and religious and traditional belief systems in various parts of Africa. It is made up of photography, text and short documentary films and was on show at the Western Oregon University’s Hamersly Library gallery before coming to Cape Town.*

After a guided exhibition, the event began with the lighting of a candle remembering queer lives lost to violence. Megan Robertson, who directed the program for the evening, provided a brief background to the event and the speakers, after which Sarojini Nadar posed various questions to the artist about his inspiration and probed into the motivations behind the exhibition in its current form. During the conversation, Carl invited two people who featured in the documentary films to join the discussion. Aurora Moses and Francis Mushambi each brought such special energy and thoughtfulness to their contributions on the panel. Their presence provided the real and embodied realities behind Carl's art, as they each spoke passionately about how their struggles with religion intersected with race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender identity.



The audience participated through comments and questions around what it means to reclaim space in the realm of the sacred, when organized religion has been violent. As Extraordinary Professor, Miranda Pillay noted in her thanks, the seventh annual “Economies of violence” event achieved what we set out to do: To provide a platform to collectively examine how religion intersects with gender, sexuality, race and class to sustain the violence and violation that women, people of colour, people who are sexually and gender diverse, and marginalized men in South Africa disproportionately experience. Through the capturing of snapshots of the lived experiences of the queer people who featured in the exhibition, Carl Collison was also able to surface the potential of religion as a resource for those who experience queer-phobic violence. The evening ended with a powerful recital of Koleka Putuma's poem "Every Three Hours" by MA student Tswelo Makoe.



*“The Annual Economies of Violence Symposium impacts how we understand the varied intersections of economy, gender, sexuality, class and race. It highlights a wide variety of simultaneous oppressions, prompting a move away from the commonly held identitarian approach to intersectionality. The symposium makes apparent the operations of real-life vectors of oppression, with the benefit of widening discussions and making available new knowledge frontiers through which to imagine change and transformation in religious and cultural traditions. The regular annual focus on this intersection allows for a long-term, sustained engagement with these ideas.”*

Fatima Seedat, Extract from a 5-year review on SARChI Chair

## Lecture: 3rd Annual Desmond Tutu Lecture Series

*The College of the Transfiguration, Makhanda (Grahamstown), Eastern Cape, August 2023*

Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti delivered the lecture at the 3rd Annual Desmond Tutu Lecture Series for the Anglican College of the Transfiguration (CoTT) on 22 August 2023. This online event focused on the life and work of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. In his lecture, “Rebuke, Repair, Reconcile” Koloti argued that whilst he values Tutu’s notion of reconciliation as the *missio Dei* in times of conflict, reconciliation is also a painful journey with steps that must still be climbed to avoid what Allan Boesak describes as “burying our wounds in shallow graves in pursuit of cheap reconciliation”. Koloti further highlighted the problematic nature of reconciliation in cases of clergy sexual abuse where there is a clear power disparity between the victim and the perpetrator. In such cases, Koloti proposed that perpetrators be rebuked and reparations towards victims be sought first before the process of reconciliation.

## Tuesday Seminar Series: ““Preaching a different kind of gospel”: Uncovering the Queer and the Sacred in Marc Lottering’s Aunty Merle”

University of the Western Cape, September 2023

In this seminar, jointly hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology and the Tutu Centre on 5 September, Megan Robertson presented a paper based on her ongoing postdoctoral research in a project on sexuality, the sacred, and arts-based activism. Below is an abstract of the lecture:



The city of Cape Town has been popularised as the ‘pink’/‘gay’ capital of Africa. Yet, concealed under the rainbow of the city, is the relationship between religion and culture and beliefs and attitudes about gender and sexuality amongst Cape Town’s Black and Coloured communities where there is a particular adherence to Christianity, Islam and African indigenous traditions.

While this is often obscured in political and even academic discourse, these experiences and tensions are reflected in the activism and art of Cape Town. In this presentation, I explore the relationship between religion and sexuality in Cape Town through the theatre productions of Marc Lottering. Lottering, who identifies as gay, is well known for his stand-up comedy routines and character skits and most recently his musicals, based on the development of one his most popular characters, Aunty Merle.

In this presentation I use a sacred prismatic lens to analyse the productions, “Aunty Merle the Musical” (2019) and its sequels, “Aunty Merle, It’s a Girl” (2019) and “Aunty Merle, Things Get Real” (2022). Aunty Merle’s popular catchphrase, “I’m just a vessel”, is often used by Lottering for comedic effect to reference the God-inspired wisdom the character imparts. I explore how Lottering and Aunty Merle become a vessel for (re)constructing the narrative of queerness in Cape Town, as Lottering uses his Coloured, Pentecostal upbringing as a pastor’s son as well as his gay sexuality as mechanisms to inspire the characters in his plays and to address issues of race, class, sexuality and religion.



## Seminar/Workshop: Gender Justice and the Bible

*The College of the Transfiguration, Makhanda (Grahamstown), Eastern Cape, November 2023*

Miranda Pillay conducted a two-day seminar/workshop at the College of the Transfiguration, Makhanda, Eastern Cape, on invitation by “Hope Africa, The Social Development Programme of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa”. The College is the academic institution where Ordinands to the Priesthood from the Anglican Church of Southern Africa receive both theological education and spiritual formation. On the first day, Pillay delivered an address on “Gender Justice and the Bible” in the context of femicide and the spate of violence against women in the South African context. By zooming in on the “Five Marks of Mission” of the Anglican Church, Pillay pointed out that Mark Three, “To respond to human need by loving service,” and, Mark Four “To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation” are indications that the question is not “whether” the church should respond to *violence against women*, but rather “how” it ought to respond. Here, the Bible is usually regarded as the primary reference. In this regard, Pillay highlighted the influence of tradition, experience, and reason in the interpretation of biblical texts. (<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>)

Following the address, Pillay facilitated discussions on how the Bible is used to uphold patriarchy as being God-ordained in contemporary contexts; how such a ‘holy hierarchy’ has shaped the subjugation of women and continues to justify economic, physical, psychological, and spiritual violence; and how the Bible may serve as a resource to challenge unjust gender power-relations. By the end of Day 1, participants were ready to explore how ancient biblical texts may be used as an intervention strategy in violence against women and femicide in contemporary contexts.

On the second day, Pillay gave input on biblical hermeneutics with particular reference to a feminist practice of enquiry, which has both, critical and constructive dimensions. Here, Pillay explored how sexism and androcentrism, inherent in patriarchy, are described and then reinscribed to prescribe death-dealing beliefs and behaviour towards women. Second, through a critical analysis of power and language in social locations in both ancient and contemporary contexts, the violence perpetrated against women may be challenged. Participants went into break-away groups where they discussed how biblical texts set for the three Sundays during the “16- Days of Activism for NO VIOLENCE against Women” (25 November -10 December) may be interpreted to address violence against women in their relevant contexts. Data generated from small group discussions, and hermeneutical insights gained from the address and inputs by Pillay guided participants to write sermon notes and develop sermon outlines for their respective communities.

## Keynote Lectures

### Keynote Lecture: “Church and Justice Conference”

*Yarnfield, United Kingdom, June 2023*



Sarojini Nadar presented a keynote lecture at the above conference organised by the Anglican outreach organisation, USPG (United Society for Partnerships in the Gospel). Her paper was entitled "God is not a Christian, God is not a Man, God is not White: Three Provocations for Justice." In the paper, she reflected on the challenges of “God-talk” in an increasingly conservative political and

religious climate in the UK. The paper was subsequently published in the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa. (See publications at the end of the report).

## Keynote Lecture: “Mary-Anne Plaatjies van-Huffel Memorial Lecture”

University of Stellenbosch, August 2023



Miranda Pillay delivered the fourth Mary-Anne Plaatjies van-Huffel Memorial Lecture at the University of Stellenbosch. Plaatjies van-Huffel, the first woman ordained minister in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), was also the first woman of colour to be promoted to full professor at the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch.

In her lecture, “Trailblazing women leaders: Off the (patriarchal) beaten track” Pillay argued that, while she agrees with North American feminist theologian, Schüssler Fiorenza, that women, “have moved into the academy, taken on leadership positions, and claimed their religious agency and heritage,” many women leaders like Plaatjies van-Huffel have to navigate their leadership and exercise their agency along a patriarchal beaten track, where somewhat faded white privilege signposts still remain. Pillay argued that the mere presence of women (and ‘othered’ bodies) does not automatically transform the patriarchal, heteronormative culture of ecclesial and academic spaces, reiterating that representation does not equal transformation.

## Interfaith Webinar: Conversations on Reading the Bible and Qur’an Through Multiple Gendered Lenses

Online, August 2023



“Side by Side: Faith Movement for Gender Justice”, in collaboration with Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World) hosted an international webinar, “Conversations on Reading the Bible and Qur’an Through Multiple Gendered Lenses”, on 24 August 2023. The two presentations – one by Miranda Pillay and another by Prof. Ghasem Darzi from Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran – were followed by a panel discussion moderated by Nontando Hadebe. Miranda Pillay’s contribution: “Body and Being in Acts 8:26-40: Towards Legitimate Presence of ‘Othered’ Bodies” focuses on the socio-cultural and ideological textures of the selected text, demonstrating how ‘identity markers’ such as “Ethiopian” and “eunuch” have generally been ignored by mainly white male scholars. Employing a feminist practice of enquiry, with a theo-ethical gender justice framing,

Pillay argued that, to recognise the intersectionality and rhetorical significance of ‘identity markers’ such as race; class, mutilated genitalia, and ambiguous sexual identity is to recognise the legitimate presence of the racially- and sexually marked body of the Ethiopian ‘traveler’. Through such critical readings, the agency of the “othered” body and the legitimacy of voice become of great consequence. Not only do we hear “What is to prevent me from being baptised” (Acts 8:36) but we also “see” that the Ethiopian eunuch does not wait for an answer or for permission from Philip, who was on a mission to convert the unnamed Ethiopian eunuch.



## Public Lecture: “‘First to...’ Women in Leadership: Badge or Badgering? Reflections on Exceptionalism Discourse”

University of Pretoria, September 2023



Miranda Pillay delivered a Public Lecture, “‘First to...’ Women in Leadership: Badge or Badgering? Reflections on Exceptionalism Discourse” on 7 September 2023 at the University of Pretoria. Pillay argued that, though gender-equity policies based on quota systems prove necessary to ensure the appointment of women in positions previously reserved for men, their presence does not automatically transform patriarchal institutional cultures. She pointed out that while women may no longer be excluded from leadership positions, the problem is, what some feminists refer to as second-generation gender bias, which remains pervasively present in the patriarchal cultures of institutions and organisations. Therefore, Pillay challenged “first woman to” rhetoric and argued that “First women to...” labels define the ways in which many Black women, in particular, are characterised as exceptional. Exceptionalism discourse, argued Pillay, ignores the very idea that being “the first to...” woman supports and often perpetuates patriarchal ideals.

## Keynote address: AGM of “REAL-ANTI GBV” organisation of the Moravian Theological Seminary

Heideveld, September 2023

Miranda Pillay was invited to deliver the keynote address on the focus-theme of the organisation – which she did by adding a question mark, “Equality as “counteract” to gender-based violence?” Pillay contextualised the question by pointing out that, while South Africa’s Constitution boasts democratic values of freedom and equality for all, women are not free from being harmed, exploited, violated, marginalised, raped, and killed. Social justice practises demand transformation of structures and systems and require calling into question cultural and religious norms that justify the subjugation of women and render them “unequal” to men.

## Publications by Staff, Students, Fellows, and Associates

**Nadar, Sarojini.** 2023. "The Embodied Cost of Knowledge Activism" in *Activist Hermeneutics of Liberation and the Bible: A Global Intersectional Perspective*, eds. Gregory L. Cuéllar and Jin Young Choi. (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis), 183 –

**Nadar, Sarojini.** Paulo Ueti, and Johnathan Jodamus. 2023. “Toward Gender Justice: Reimagining Religion, Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Acts 8: 26-40.” *Ecumenical Review* 75, no. 1 (2023): 96-111.

**Nadar, Sarojini.** 2023. “‘God is not Christian, God is not White, God is not a Man’: Three Provocations for Reading Albert Nolan’s ‘God in South Africa,’” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, (177): 53-67.

**Pillay, Miranda,** 2023. “First Woman to...” Exceptionalism Discourse: Badge of Honour or Badgering Burden? *The African Journal of Gender and Religion* Vol. 29 No 2 (2023). *African Journal of Gender and Religion*, 29(2). <https://doi.org/10.36615/ajgr.v29i2.2797>.

**Pillay, Miranda**, 2023. “Mary-Anne Plaatjies-van Huffel: Trailblazing journey off the patriarchal beaten track” (2023) *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, Vol 9, No 1, 1–18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2023.v9n1.a33>.

Otu, Kwame, E., and **van Klinken, Adriaan**. 2023. African Studies Keywords: Queer. *African Studies Review*, 66(2):509–530. doi:10.1017/asr.2022.163.

Kapinde, Stephen, and **van Klinken, Adriaan**. 2023. Authority and Counter-Knowledges in the Ministry of a Kenyan Intersex Apostle. In L Juliana Claassens, Steed Davidson, Charlene van der Walt, Ashwin Thyssen (eds), *Queering the Prophet On Jonah, and Other Activists*. UK: SCM Press.

**Van Klinken, Adriaan**, Bompani, Barbara, and Parsitau, Damaris. 2023. Religious Leaders as Agents Of LGBTIQ Inclusion in East Africa. *African Affairs*, 122(487): 299–312. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adad012>.

**van Klinken, Adriaan**. 2023. The Colonial Christian Kernel of African Anti-LGBT+ Politics and Queer Humanitarianism: Conversation with Kwame E. Otu. *Political Theology*, 24(8); 793-801, DOI: 10.1080/1462317X.2023.2229205.

**Parsitau, Damaris.**, and Nyakwaka., Dorothy. 2023. The Women’s Movement and Gender Politics in Kenya. In Wanjala S. Nasong’o, Maurice N. Amutabi and Toyin Falola (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Kenya*. (USA: Palgrave Macmillan).

**Mulenga-Kaunda, Mutale**. 2023. The Bible in Public Places: A Zambian Pentecostal Woman’s Critique of Rev Sumaili’s Use of the Bible. In Jione Havea (ed) *Troubling (Public) Theologies: Spaces, Bodies, Technologies*. (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic).

**Mulenga-Kaunda, Mutale**. 2023. *Postcolonial Imbusa: Bemba Women's Agency and Indigenous Cultural Systems*. (Lanham: Lexington Books).

**Headley, Selena D.** 2023. Book Review Article. The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye: Ecumenism, Feminists, and Communal Practice by Oluwatomisin Olayinka Oredein. *The African Journal of Gender and Religion*, 29(1):160-167.

**Headley, Selena D.** 2023. Denise Ackerman’s Feminist Theology of Praxis: Formed in Lament. In Nelly Mwale, Rosinah Mmannana Gabaitse, Fundiswa Kobo & Dorothy Tembo (eds) *Nehanda: Women’s Theologies of Liberation in Southern Africa*. (Germany: Bamberg Press).

## Publications

### African Journal of Gender and Religion (AJGR) Vol 29, No. 1, July 2023



The Centre continues to house one of the only journals to focus on the intersections between gender and the study of religion, on the African continent. The journal is published bi-annually and features important research in the field. The July and December issue was no different, and an overview of the contents of the July issue found in the editorial written by Sarojini Nadar, Editor in Chief of the journal, and the December editorial, written by Fatima Seedat, co-editor of the journal.

## Editorial: Expanding Methodological, Literary and Cultural Frontiers within Feminist Studies of Religion

Sarojini Nadar ~ Editor

In this issue of the AJGR our contributors continue to explore, document and reflect on the multiple and varied ways that religion and gender intersect in, and beyond the context of Africa. It contains scholarly reflections that preoccupy feminists across geographical contexts, disciplinary borders, theoretical boundaries and methodological frontiers. Our contributors address the complex question of how religion can either, (though often simultaneously), shape positive and negative norms related to gender. In this issue, this complexity is explored through various social and geographical contexts, as well as an array of texts - historical, literary, lived, and sacred.

Writing about Sarah Palin's vice presidential nomination in 2008, Gloria Steinem declared: "Feminism has never been about getting a job for one woman. It's about making life more fair for women everywhere. It's not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It's about baking a new pie."<sup>1</sup> While Steinem was speaking specifically about women in American politics, this applies to what many of us have felt in our collective feminist gut about mainstream academia too - apart from the pie being too small, the piece of pie that we get is often simply unpalatable. We need to bake a new pie! What are the ingredients for such a pie, and how does it look, taste and feel? Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, scholar-artist-activist, showcases the possibilities of both form and content, in her piece "[In] Searching Our Mothers' Archives: Building *Umi's Archive* through Mourning Work."

Originally submitted as a "praxis" piece for the journal because of the ways in which Abdul Khabeer explores the creative and the speculative within historical archives, we were prompted by one of the peer reviewers to make this piece one of our "mainstream" articles, precisely because we align ourselves as a journal, with Abdul Khabeer's central contention that "Black feminist scholarship provokes us to reimagine archives in creative and speculative ways." Drawing on the physical archive and the digital space of an exhibition series curated by the author, Abdul Khabeer's article not only weaves together the important narrative of her *Umi*, Amina Amatul Haqq, but she surfaces her method of representation and analysis of the archive, as a means to interrogate how we do Black feminist work in the academy. She concludes that,

"... though intimacy gives access to knowledge, it is not totalizing. It does not give you access to everything there is to be known because, as we know, our knowledge, wherever we acquire it, is always partial. However, intimacy does provide a more dynamic knowing. In colonial epistemologies, we are only supposed to approach our work with the "eye of a scholar" and that is what makes it legitimate research, valuable, and the hallmark of the Euro-American intellectual tradition. However, I have found using only one lens inhibits understanding. In fact, this project is at its best when I am all of those things at the same time, scholar, activist-artist, and child, opening up knowledge rather than foreclosing it as "objectivity" discourse presumes."

*"Our contributors address the complex question of how religion can either, (though often simultaneously), shape positive and negative norms related to gender. In this issue, this complexity is explored through various social and geographical contexts, as well as an array of texts - historical, literary, lived, and sacred."*

<sup>1</sup> Gloria Steinem. "Palin: Wrong woman, wrong message." *The Los Angeles Times*, September 2008.

Abdul Khabeer's piece, in both content and form, provides a powerful and poignant challenge to the systems of knowledge-making, which we are, as feminist scholars, simultaneously implicated in, and contribute to. It is certainly a fitting way to open this issue of the journal.

In many ways, representation and analysis of the kind offered by Abdul Khabeer, constitutes an exercise in 'epistemic risk.' This is a subject that Pumla Gqola picks up in her article: "Religious Mapping, Epistemic Risk and Archival Adventure in Athambile Masola's *Ilifa*." Like Abdul Khabeer, Gqola too is asking key questions about archives and power, through an examination of Masola's debut collection of poetry and her "uses of Christian vocabularies to amplify multigenerational African (women's) contribution to South Africa's intellectual and creative archives." Gqola argues that "[W]hereas all deliberate products of the imagination are an encounter with risk, additional danger attaches to a poetry project in which a contemporary African feminist attempts to write herself into a vanishing tradition." Gqola shows the ways in which Masola not just contributes to African literature, but how she linguistically subverts the missionary project of African literacy through this collection in isiXhosa, as well as how she theoretically (perhaps even theologically) punctures missionary attempts to create the ideal "Victorian-native" woman, through her feminist imaginative ends.

Continuing with the theme of missionary initiatives, in the third article, "Making Good Women: The bequeaths of colonial encounters in the making of the Clergy Wife in Ghana" the trope of the "good woman" is explored via the making of the "clergy wife" position in Ghana. Abene Kyere expands the literature on how missionary enterprises created the "ideal" Christian woman, to show how the making of the position of "clergy wife" (CW) set a utopian standard that remains to this day. The article traces "the complex historical 'formation' of the position of the CW in Ghana by showing that the education the girls received was gendered and domestic. While it might not have been a particularly enviable position to be a CW in the West, the Ghanaian case tells a different story," Kyere argues. She concludes that "[I]t was, indeed, a privilege for girls or young women to be recommended for the position. However, the position was consciously created through a Western-gendered ideology of expected roles and positions for men and women. A CW was, thus, expected to the missionary and Western concept of acceptable womanhood."

While Kyere seems to suggest that the Ghanaian clergy wife trope was 'created' and 'made' by western Christian missionary ideals, leaving little room for women's agency, Elorm Stiles-Ocran in her article, "Theology and Women's Agency in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence" demonstrates how women's agency comes to the fore, in a different situational context. Challenging the literature that seems to govern studies on IPV that "cultural norms and religion sustain women's experiences of IPV," Stiles-Ocran, drawing on "constructivist grounded theory to inductively analyze the stories of thirteen abused Christian women in a mainline church in southern Ghana," assembles and posits a more nuanced account of the relationship between theological beliefs and IPV. While not denying how "multiple systems, including informal social support networks, constrain survivors" she also demonstrates how the personal faith and individually constructed theologies of survivors, "serve as catalysts to their self-enactments and emerging agency, concluding that " these findings provide nuance to existing (and contested) conceptions of agency."

*"the contributions in this issue of the journal continues to expand the frontiers of scholarship at the intersections of the study of religion and gender."*

Exploring a different type of agency, that could arguably be considered a textual agency, Gertrud Tönsing, in her article "Losing the Lost Coin: Gender Doublets in the Synoptic Tradition," critically examines a literary tradition of parable gender doublets in the bible. She convincingly argues for the importance of placing such narratives (for example the woman with the lost coin, or



the woman baking with leaven), within the historical Jesus tradition as gender parable doublets, since it likely demonstrates an intention to include historically female and male lived experiences within didactic illustrations. Notwithstanding the gender-essentialist framing of these roles, the inclusion of tasks traditionally designated "female" to illustrate 'higher' spiritual values about the kingdom of God within the historical Jesus tradition makes a difference to the authority such texts are granted in contemporary societies. In contexts where the bible is regarded as a sacred text, authorising contemporary gendered norms, the deliberate and conscious construction of these gendered doublets provides emancipatory possibilities for contemporary Christian women, which effectively challenge the later epistle instructions that oppose women's leadership and participation.

Moving from biblical mandates that prohibit women's full religious participation and leadership, in the final piece in this issue, Sonene Nyawo's article, "Deprivation of Land Tenure to Daughters of Mother Earth: The Case of Eswatini" shows how cultural mandates also limit and control women's access to economic autonomy and leadership. She demonstrates that "under Swazi law and custom, a woman can only be granted land rights by the chief through her husband, male relatives, or male children." Through three case studies, Nyawo's article reveals the limited utility of legislation which grant women equal access to property rights, in contexts where social and cultural norms dominate women's acquisition to such rights. The tension between legislative change and cultural gendered norms are once again brought to the fore in Nyawo's piece and indicates the ongoing challenges which must be taken up in feminist activist and academic spaces.

Overall, the contributions in this issue of the journal continues to expand the frontiers of scholarship at the intersections of the study of religion and gender. Cultural, social, literary, and religious scholarly landscapes are creatively and critically explored, to reveal how deep theorising and intellectual reflection are key to the ongoing work of crafting emancipatory gendered conditions.

## Editorial: (De)Colonial Entanglements with Religion

*Fatima Seedat, Co-Editor*

Published at a time when the world is bearing witness to the genocide of Palestinians after 75 years of Israeli occupation, the articles presented here may be read as part of an increasingly voluble conversation on the intersections of religion and coloniality.

*“The works presented here are part of that broader conversation about religion in the hands of coloniality, how it works and un-works relationships of cruelty and care, oppression and liberation, solidarity, and enmity.”*

The contradictory operations of religion as both oppressive and liberatory are stark at this time; daily we witness generations of Palestinian families bombed to death in an instant, while lone survivors navigate loss by re-affirming their faith and confirming their religious convictions. We continually hear the occupation forces attempting to justify displacement, and the starvation of millions of Palestinians under occupation, as the only means to achieving their own religious goals. Contrary to colonial encounters of religion with social, economic and political subjugation articulated as a modernising enterprise in the past, the resistance to religious subjugation we are presently seeing is part of the decolonial turn which recognizes how the analytical category of religion functions simultaneously as a racial, gender and class category that aligns religion, authority and authenticity with whiteness, maleness and ideas of superiority that claim a higher degree of human-ness for some over others. Feminism and religion are easily positioned as

naturally antithetical to one another when colonial discourses monopolize feminism for imperial and modernising purposes, rendering colonised communities culturally outmoded, and potentially so irrelevant as to warrant eradication. The works presented here are part of that broader conversation about religion in the hands of coloniality, how it works and un-works relationships of cruelty and care, oppression and liberation, solidarity, and enmity.

The first article is Noxolo Matele's, "Leave her Alone, She is telling the Truth", which departs from the premise that Christianity in African context is not neutral, "its arrival in the name of civilization, also dispossessed Africans of their culture and religion... taught Africans subservience to Europeans and became a way by which to deny Africans expression of their unique culture and religious practices...[and] was seen by many to legitimize colonialism or even to participate in it". Through her analysis of a play that fictionalizes the true story of three Rwandan convent high-school girls – Alphonsine, Anathalie and Marie-Claire – whose only Vatican-approved Marian apparitions in Africa garnered widespread attention, Noxolo Matete offers an African feminist reading of Christian religious experience. Her contribution is in recognizing the contradictions and nuances of the experiences of young women of faith in the postcolonial, global South. Through an African feminist reading of Katori Hall's play, *Our Lady of Kibeho* (2018), set in 1981 at a convent high school in Kibeho, Rwanda, "partly through fact and partly through fiction", Matete shows how the play offers a decolonized reading of a Christian experience. The different roles of the three girls simulate the Trinity of Christianity, and amongst them, one also emerges in the characteristic form of the subaltern "the female figure who shifts from 'historically muted subject' to agent". And so, Matele's aim is to help us 'see' how the play disrupts the "neat binaries of oppressive or liberatory. Traditional Christianity - a worldview rooted in Eurocentric, racist and patriarchal ideals and which situated African women as non-human - is reimagined in Hall's play, as it ceases to be the domain of the Church, Western empire or traditional patriarchal domination. Instead, presented in its ambiguities and complexities, Christianity as a religious structure and through the varied experiences of 'the Trinity', is powerfully reclaimed." Matele's analysis prompts us to examine how their visitations also predict what was to be the Rwandan genocide a decade later, and further how the girls also shift from being believed and blessed and become accused of lying and pretense – the brutality of the vision is too much for the ecstatic religious experience.

In the next article, Princess Sibanda positions herself as a "radical feminist whose scholarly interests are in the study of the taboo" while also embracing the Christian parts of herself. She draws on the theoretical work of pathbreaking African feminist theologian Isabel Phiri whose work shows how "Africans experienced the gospel as a tool of colonialism, classism and exclusionism". Her article "Itai Amen Satani Abhoikane: Killjoy Feminism in The Church" introduces the work of Chaplain Christabel Phiri (not to be mistaken for Isabel Phiri), a Zimbabwean preacher who "is reshaping theological discourse in Zimbabwe", and redefining the shorthand dichotomy too frequently set up between Christianity and feminism. She positions Chaplain Phiri amongst the "killjoys, the unfearful, problematic women (who) do not fit neatly within the packages of socio-political categories and norms" and who may therefore "craft a feminism that is situated in progressive Christianity". For Sibanda, Chaplain Phiri is already doing this; her analysis makes visible the possibilities of feminist praxis in church spaces as demonstrated through five of Chaplain Phiri's sermons, each of them a form of theological performance. "Phiri's feminism is a lived reality, it does not begin on the pulpit and end there. Phiri is a Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services Chaplain whose life story is one punctuated by "carrying six mountains on the back". She has experienced life as an orphan, a widow and a sex worker, suffered a mild stroke and has survived a brain tumour. Her life story is a recurring motif in her sermons as she draws on her personal story to profile her arduous life journey and how she persevered. Instead of portraying herself as a sacrosanct entity, Phiri brings her 'dirty linen' or 'sins' onto the pulpit." Phiri's use of role play, strong language, her identity with morally questionable labels, the exuberance on stage and in the audience, and her use of dancehall songs collectively facilitate Sibanda's analysis of this nexus between killjoy feminism and African feminist theologies, which illustrates the complex liberatory potentials of feminist theology. Drawing on the work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Sibanda posits that African feminist theologies, such as those that arise from the preaching of Chaplain Phiri, "belong within the broader ambit of African liberation theologies". Like Matete, Sibanda also engages the contradictions between theology founded on sanctity, purity, and holiness, and the 'choking' encounter of Africans with Christianity. The Church as location of performance, "holds the codes of conduct which specify which kind of

bodies are eligible to inhabit and worship in it.” Consequently, the church which “is constructed as a place of perennial joy and freedom unfortunately incubates violence for women too.” What Chaplain Phiri offers instead is a theology that is “popular, participatory and troublesome. I would add, it is also disobedient and decolonial.”

Sibanda and Matete both focus on women’s expressions of faith; each shows the complex ways in which feminist and Christian ways of being come together, recognising both the inherent challenges and liberatory potentials, and Miranda Pillay continues this work too.

*“Genocide, generationality, entanglements of oppression and liberation, challenges to normative religiosities in the recognition of subaltern religious subjectivities and the struggles for authentic world-making that do not deny feminist agency – these are some of the threads that frame a decolonial feminist approach to religion.”*

Pillay’s article ““First Woman to...” Exceptionalism Discourse: Badge of Honour or Badgering Burden?” takes us further into the patriarchal challenge that religion presents when it ‘tries’ to include women. The ubiquitous practice of first-ism, in Pillay’s view, enables “‘the church’ to continue “patriarchal attitudes, beliefs and practices”. For “while the presence of women in ‘previously’ male-dominated spaces calls for celebration, there’s much need for commiseration.” The badge “first woman to...” becomes a form of ‘badgering’ characterised by exceptionalism, and the valorization of women’s capabilities are employed in the service of patriarchy rather than resistance to it. Pillay focuses on Mary-Anne Plaatjies Van Huffel’s ecclesiastical journey in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), who amongst other ‘first’ women, was “expected to take up leadership positions in ‘previously’ male dominated spaces with little, or no effort from the institution to transform its patriarchal culture.” Thus, while first-ism is often couched in celebration, Pillay argues for an equal recognition of the travails that first-ism brings, arguing that commiseration is more in order than celebration, “to recognise the fact that women are burdened over and over again, generation after generation with the task of clearing weeds that cushion the patriarchal

track of male privilege.” Exceptionalism discourse, Pillay argues, “camouflages second-generation gender bias and upholds patriarchal normativity” or as Sarojini Nadar names it “palatable patriarchy.” In response, Pillay explores the counter-cultural virtue of unctuousness, which “is the creative tension between resistance and endurance”. For the latter she “points to the intentionality to resist the subtle, less visible, oftentimes unintentional, and sometimes patronising forms of gender bias”. Pillay concludes with an argument for reflective solidarity “not as a social value in an abstract sense, but as an embodied ecclesial practice toward transforming the patriarchal institutional culture of ‘the church’.”

Shifting our focus from Christianity specifically, Nina Hoel explores various trends in the study of religion and feminist theory for tools and concepts that “trouble the dualisms and hierarchies of human-nature and nature-culture” and “tune-in religion storytelling (the study of religion) to the challenges of the Anthropocene.” Inspired by what she calls ‘crochet methodology’, derived from a Crochet Coral Reef Project at the Cape Town Aquarium, Hoel writes “Crochet Methodology: Thinking Creatively about and with the Study of Religion in the Anthropocene”. Her analysis comes to rest on ideas of kinship and the ‘intimacy of strangers’ to explore symposium – the collective processes of “making-with each other” that might enable a different approach to the study of religion and “the stuff of religion.” Examining how knowledge-making might arise from art, and in this way move away from the anthropocentric ways of knowing, Hoel envisions an approach to religion that acknowledges our entanglements with the material and the non-human. Recognizing how religion has always had a focus on the more-than-human, Hoel asks what such critique would look like if we moved away from human exceptionalism and if “more-than-human materialities featured

more centrally.” Hoel’s provocations are well-placed, especially where the study of religion has become anthropocentric, leaving behind narratives that center the non-human and prioritise material aspects of religion over the spiritual, the transcendent and the ethereal. Feminist ways of knowing and knowledge-making have much to offer the encounter of religion with the anthropocene, the least of which would be the generational passage of non-normative knowledges of the material or natural world. For Hoel, “feminist imaginings of kinship” and the “collaborative and co-creative efforts of collectives to storying religion”, have the potential to keep troubling the power dynamics of the contemporary Anthropocene.

Genocide, generationality, entanglements of oppression and liberation, challenges to normative religiosities in the recognition of subaltern religious subjectivities and the struggles for authentic world-making that do not deny feminist agency – these are some of the threads that frame a decolonial feminist approach to religion. The articles here offer various inroads to these discussions, recognising the transgressive positionings of gender, race, class, and the geo-politics of being human, and other than human, in registers that are both pejorative and privileged. Once we recognise decolonial practice as the practice toward freedom, we are able to identify the very direct links between the works presented here and the (im)possibility (yet perhaps also the necessity?) of Christmas celebrations in Palestine in December 2023.

Seedat, Fatima. 2024. ‘Editorial: (De)Colonial Entanglements with Religion’. *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 29 (2). <https://doi.org/10.36615/ajgr.v29i2.2937>.



# *Religion and Media*

*Given the rapidly increasing presence, power, and persuasion of digital and electronic media on the African continent and in the global economy, the study of religion and the media is a flourishing field of intellectual inquiry. A focus on religion and media highlights how representations of religious identity, formations of community, and questions of authority are constructed and contested in mediated and mediatised spaces and the consequences of these multifaceted arrangements for offline experiences and environments. Furthermore, media spaces may contest as well as re-inscribe traditional discourses, ideologies and practices of power and privilege, inclusion and exclusion while offering novel spaces for these productions and circulations of identity, authority, and community. With this thematic area the Centre advances approaches, both theoretical and methodological, that foreground the multiple and complex relationships between religions and media.*

## Graduate Research



### **“Exploring Christian purity culture on the Cape Flats: A Case Study of Shana Fife's Blogs and Books”**

**Ashleigh Petersen-Cloete**

**PhD Student**

**Pre-proposal Phase**

This research will examine Christian purity culture using the writings of a popular blogger and writer on the Cape Flats as a case study. Shana Fife's writings provide important clues for understanding the intersection of gendered, social, cultural, and religious influences on the community.



### **“Muslim Digital Content Creatives expressions of religious identity, beliefs, and practices on Instagram and TikTok: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis”**

**Sakeenah Dramat**

**PhD Student**

**Pre-proposal Phase**

This study employs a qualitative research design incorporating a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis to explore how Muslim Digital Creatives showcase their religious identities, beliefs, and practices through their content creation on Instagram and TikTok. It explores how a group of purposively selected influential social media content producers, Muslim Digital Creatives, have reshaped social media platforms into digital spaces where they form communities and express their religious identities, beliefs, and practices.



### **“Online Shaming and Implicit Religion: An Exploration of social ostracism within digital contexts.”**

**Aamirah Benjamin**

**MA Candidate**

Implicit Religion describes how individuals and groups display behaviours that appear to be religious in their orientations but are not considered traditionally religious. This study explores the ways in which online shaming as a digital practice of social disciplining, may be considered a form and function of Implicit Religion.



### **“Social media and the Mediation of Religious authority, identity and community”**

**Corne Hendricks**

**MA Student**

**Pre-proposal Phase**

This project explores and analyses, through the case-study of the Valley View Church in Cape Town, South Africa how Pentecostal Charismatic Churches express their religious authority, identity and community on social media.

## Conferences, Seminars, and Workshops

### Second Annual International Conference on Religion, Culture and Peace

Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, April 2023



Lee Scharnick Udemans attended the Second Annual International Conference on Religion, Culture, and Peace hosted by Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand, between April 27 and 28, 2023. This conference brought together researchers from the Global South, especially South Asia and Southeast Asia. Lee was motivated to attend this conference for a variety of reasons, including the opportunity to disseminate her work and build academic networks outside the context of the Global North. Her paper entitled, "Mediated and Mediatized Expressions of Religious Diversity in South Africa" explored how, through social media, individual actors are producing new narratives and representations of religious diversity, usurping the primacy and power of both traditional media and expressions of religious authority. Prior to the conference, Lee served as a member of the International Review Board, participating in the rating of abstracts, and during the conference, she also chaired a session on the theme "Religion and Education".

### African Association for the Study of Religion (AASR) Conference

Nairobi, Kenya, August 2023



Lee Scharnick-Udemans attended the biennial 9th AASR conference. The conference theme was "Creativity, Innovation, and Imagination in African Religions" and Scharnick-Udemans delivered a paper on the prospects of digital religion studies in (South) Africa. In light of how the popularity and ubiquity of digital technology have increased in the past decade, the multiple connections between digital religion and the politics of knowledge production about religion in (South) Africa, Scharnick-Udemans argued that digital religion studies signify an exciting and daunting focus in religious studies in general, and the study of material religion in particular, however, most studies on this topic derive from the Global North and Africans scholars have to a large extent been excluded from the epistemological labour of the field.

The paper mapped a few of the potential and possibilities of digital religion studies for the African context by referring to scholarly studies on religion and digital media that are focused on South African contexts to highlight how scholars in the region have already responded to the possibilities that a focus on digitality and religiosity might offer. She then provided empirical examples



which emphasised the scope of research topics that are available to scholars interested in pursuing the possibilities that digital media may yield for the study of religion in South Africa in particular and Africa more broadly.

## Asian Centre for Religions Communication (ARC) 14th International Roundtable

*Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand, November 2023*

Lee Scharnick-Udemans attended the Asian Centre for Religions Communication (ARC) 14th International Roundtable, which was held over two days at Thammasat University, Bangkok Thailand. The theme for the roundtable was “Religious Communication and the Digital Future: Prospects, Concerns, and Responses”. Scharnick-Udemans delivered a presentation entitled “Between Promise and Peril: Observations on Moral Panic, Popular Culture, and Religion”. The abstract follows:



The potential of Artificial Intelligence (hereafter referred to as AI), in its seemingly infinite possibilities and transmutations, commands the attention of contemporary popular culture, news, and social media. The landing pages of familiar streaming channels such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Apple TV are evidence of the continually growing collection of mediated content wherein AI is featured as a central theme.

In addition to films; tech news media sites, offering information and commentary related to AI developments are popular and accessible sources of information. Unfortunately, the content on these sites, like the films, are foreboding in tone, offering headlines that reflect issues and questions related to AI, as urgent and imminent. This article explores how mediated representations in the form of films and tech news contribute to engendering collective public apprehension and concern about AI. It suggests that the agenda-setting function of media, especially its imperative to encourage public concern over matters that may or may not constitute threats to social order, can be more critically understood through the framework that the concept moral panic provides. In doing so, the article conceptualises the current moment as the embryonic phase of a moral panic. It advances the idea that we are able, at this stage of the process, to acknowledge and abate growing concerns and fears about AI that may constitute a full blown moral panic. In conclusion, I suggest that while we should certainly approach AI with critical curiosity, the danger of a moral panic is that it may result in permanent, indiscriminate, and harsh admonishment of AI, undermining its potential to serve humanity in positive and life-affirming ways.

The presentation and the paper which were published in December 2023, contribute to the DTC’s Religion and Media thematic focus. Drawing on the tools and techniques of a range of disciplines, including film studies, critical media studies, religious studies, and sociology, this work reflects the Centre’s commitment to supporting creative and critical, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research. Following fruitful discussions with the director of the ARC, based on the shared interests and intellectual commitments of the ARC and the DTC, it was decided that both parties would intentionally investigate opportunities to work together to enhance African-Asian research relationships in the context of the study of religion and media. According to Scharnick-Udemans, “It was refreshing and inspiring to participate in an international conference that was not dominated and directed by the intellectual traditions and epistemological orientations of the Global North”.



## Publications by Staff, Students, Fellows, and Associates

**Scharnick-Udemans, Lee.** 2023. "Prospects and Potential for the Study of Religion and Digital Media in (South) Africa." *What Has Religion Studies in Africa Been Up To?* Edited by Jaco Beyers. 53-76 Wipf and Stock Publishers.

**Scharnick-Udemans, Lee.** 2023. "Between Promise and Peril: Observations on Moral Panic, Popular Culture and Religion". *Religion and Social Communication* 21(2) 294-312.

**Beydoun, Khaled A.** 2023. CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/21/opinions/how-arab-muslim-americans-feel-war-beydoun/index.html>

# *Religion, Education, and Epistemology*

*The decolonial turn in global higher education, has prompted a paradigmatic shift in the study of religion, that scholarship from South Africa is poised to lead. The shifts are both epistemological and pedagogical. This focus area explores indigenous/localised as well as subjugated/marginalised knowledge and meaning making in the study of religion. What knowledge is being produced, how is such knowledge created and engaged with, and who is producing such knowledge are key questions that are asked. Furthermore, critically reflecting on pedagogical praxis is a key task in this context, hence transforming the content and the processes required for more decolonial, feminist and queer pedagogies, forms the basis of this focus area. As such, the postgraduate training workshops and supervision offered within the Centre are considered important steps towards “educational justice.”*

*The postgraduate training programme is a project in the decolonisation and democratisation of education. Through structured and focused thematic workshops the process of academic writing is demystified and students are given the necessary support they need to navigate the research process.*

## Graduate Research

### Master of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies

*Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Bossey, Switzerland*

Ishaya Anthony is pursuing a Master of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies at the Ecumenical Institute (affiliated with the University of Geneva) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Bossey, Switzerland. He joined the Institute in September 2023, and since then, he has been part of a diverse cohort of 33 students from different nationalities, cultures and church denominations. Throughout the fall semester, Anthony and his colleagues collaborated in conducting ecumenical worship services. The services provided opportunities for individuals from different church traditions to contribute to a shared liturgy. Anthony took the lead in organising, leading, and preaching during a few of these services. The Ecumenical Institute has provided a holistic learning environment. Anthony is interning at the World Council of Churches (WCC) headquarters in the Department of Child Rights. His involvement extends beyond academic and social spheres, as he is dedicating efforts to his MAS research, focusing on "Re-imagining Ecumenism in promoting the Agenda 2063 of the African Union."



In addition to academic pursuits, Anthony has participated in various ecumenical study visits. These include trips to Taizé in France, the Sisters of Grand Champ in Switzerland, the Chambesy Orthodox community, and a weekend of experiencing Swiss parish life in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. During these visits, he has had opportunities for various enriching ecumenical experiences outside of the Institute. He also attended Christian Week of Prayer in Rome, hosted by the Roman Catholic Dicastery of Christian Unity, where the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury conducted the ecumenical closing worship service. Anthony's involvement in the Christian Week of Prayer was noteworthy, as he participated in an interview with Vatican News. During the interview, he discussed religious intolerance in Northern Nigeria, highlighting the need for ecumenism of blood and ecumenism of the heart in promoting religious solidarity and human flourishing. Anthony's journey at the ecumenical Institute will culminate in June. With the knowledge gained from Bossey, he looks forward to actively participating and engaging academically and practically in life-affirming ecumenical endeavours nationally, regionally and globally.

### Postgraduate Research Workshops

Within this reporting period, two cohort supervision workshops were held on 2-4 May and 30-31 August. With the benefit of having their research focus and questions developed and sharpened in the first workshop in February, Masters and PhD students were then able to move to the next workshop which focused on theories and methods.

### Cohort 2: Theories and Methods

*University of the Western Cape, May 2023*



The purpose of the workshop was to help students focus and develop theoretical, conceptual and methodological frameworks that will guide their research. Prior to the workshop, we shared a range of resources with the students to help them prepare. Two renowned scholars of religion, Asonzeh Ukah and Nina Hoel, provided various inputs on developing theoretical and methodological frameworks for research. As part of our commitment to building Global South partnerships, Dr Le Ly from Payap University also

attended this workshop. The concept of deep and rigorous scholarship was illustrated and framed via the metaphor of sourdough bread, in a material and theoretical sense!

### Cohort 3: Data Analysis and Writing

University of the Western Cape, August 2023



This workshop was designed to assist students to bring together the various strands of either their proposals, or their chapters in a way that coheres. One of the tools that they were provided with, was a research table (see below).

Research Questions	Research Objectives ( <i>Choose your own verbs</i> )	Theories/ Concepts	Methods	Data Analysis	Sources: Key Scholars /Key research participants/Sample
1. What....	1. To describe/illustrate...				
2. What/ How?	2. To explain/illuminate...				
3. Why?	3. To theorise/analyse...				

Overall, students continue to find value in both the practical research training they receive (such as the research table), as well as the challenges they are provided with to think critically and creatively about their intellectual contributions.

#### **Megan Robertson reflected on her own journey with the cohort space recently:**

*My trajectory from PhD student to postdoc to senior researcher and then to an internationally based postdoctoral researcher, is evidence of the capacity building work that happens in the Chair. As a PhD student Cohort (an internal shorthand adopted for the graduate training programme) became a space where students and supervisors supported and critiqued my work. It was the community which stretched and transformed who I was and what my project was without breaking me, or it. It was in these spaces I was challenged with my privilege as a cis-gender, heterosexual, Christian woman and where I further explored (and was confronted by) what it meant to be a black, coloured, young woman entering the academy. I have become a more confident, rigorous and thoughtful researcher and person because of this community of scholars.*

### Research Proposal Writing Workshop

Payap University, Thailand, April 2023



As a part of the Centre's endeavours to internationalise the cohort model of supervision, and following a successful workshop provided by Sarojini Nadar and Johnathan Jodamus in December 2022, Lee Scharnick-Udemans was invited to present a research proposal writing workshop for the PhD students in the Religion, Culture and Peace Lab at Payap University, Chiang Mai. The workshop provided an overview of the various components that are needed in the production of a feasible and critical research



proposal. Dr Ly Le from Payap University in Chiang Mai Thailand joined us in Cape Town for the second cohort of the year with a view of developing a similar model for PhD students in the Religion, Culture and Peace Lab.

## Workshop: “Messy Methods: Religion Research in Practice”

King's College, London, May 2023



Sarojini Nadar was invited to be a respondent to the presentations in this workshop, where UK and Scandinavian scholars who are engaged in empirical studies of religion, collectively reflected on the challenges they have faced in researching religion. The scholars shared very practical examples of the most common things that can, and do go 'wrong' in the field. It was a vulnerable space where actual examples and personal confessions were made. The presentations will be developed for a book commissioned by Oxford University Press, on the theme of the workshop.

## Research Methodology Workshop

University of the Western Cape, September 2023

### PRACTICAL METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP



**DR MEGAN ROBERTSON** | UKRI (PREVIOUSLY MARIE-CURIE) POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW, UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

#### WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

This half day workshop will be offered to MA and PhD students in religion and theology who are pursuing qualitative research projects using interviews, focus groups, observations, and/or ethnographic methods. The workshop is aimed at students who are new to fieldwork of this nature as well as more experienced students who want to work on developing their techniques and skills in the field. This is a largely practical workshop and most of our time will be spent conducting mock interviews/focus groups and receiving peer feedback.

#### IN THE WORKSHOP WE WILL AIM TO COVER THE FOLLOWING:

- Introduction to the theory of methods behind interviews, focus groups and observational methods.
- Interview/focus group/observational schedules.
- Interview techniques, skills, and ethics.
- Reflexivity - what does it mean in practice?

**DATE:** MONDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 2023  
**TIME:** 09:00-12:00  
**VENUE:** DTC BOARDROOM, LEVEL 1 OLD ARTS BUILDING, UWC

**COST:** FREE  
**RSVP:** DTC@UWC.AC.ZA (SPACE IS LIMITED SO REGISTRATION IS ESSENTIAL)

Held on 4 September, this half day workshop was offered to MA and PhD students in religion in theology who are pursuing qualitative research projects using interviews, focus groups, observations, and/or ethnographic methods. The workshop was aimed at students who are new to fieldwork of this nature, as well as more experienced students who wanted to work on developing their techniques and skills in the field. It was a largely practical workshop and most of the time was spent conducting mock interviews/focus groups and receiving peer feedback.

The workshop covered the following areas: - Introduction to the theory of methods behind interviews, focus groups and observational methods.

- Interview/focus group/observation schedules.
- Interview techniques, skills, and ethics.
- Reflexivity – what does it mean in practice?

The six postgraduate students and the postdoc scholar who attended all expressed great appreciation for the workshop.

## Workshop on research purpose and literature review, PhD Seminar Class

Payap University, Thailand, September 2023



Sarojini Nadar and Johnathan Jodamus were invited to offer a postgraduate workshop at Payap University on 8 and 9 September. The purpose of the workshop was to, in very practical ways, help students develop and sharpen their research focus, questions and objectives. The students, who mainly come from activist and NGO work backgrounds, were assisted to translate their "real problems" into research problems. To do this, they were encouraged to allow for their research focus to derive directly from the gaps (or areas for further exploration) that they identified in their review of literature. The students were provided with a range of resources to help them prepare for the workshop. Overall, both the faculty and students expressed great appreciation for the workshop, with some helpful suggestions for future directions.

### Workshop reviews:

+ *Very meaningful.*

+ *Excellent workshop – wonderfully helpful.*

+ *Excellent support to help students in the right way and direction. Very helpful.*

+ *The workshop is helpful to all the senior students and the new students. It helps us learn with the literature review basis and shape/reshape our study topic.*

+ *Excellent: great examples and case studies. Great guidance and Q&A. Very concrete constructive feedback. Thanks a gazillion.*

+ *It would be really helpful if the kind of thesis writing workshop is done every semester. Next time, prefer how to do literature review, citation, etc (with the same resource persons / lecturers).*

+ *The workshop really gave an input on how to work on framing and develop a roadmap for the research work.*

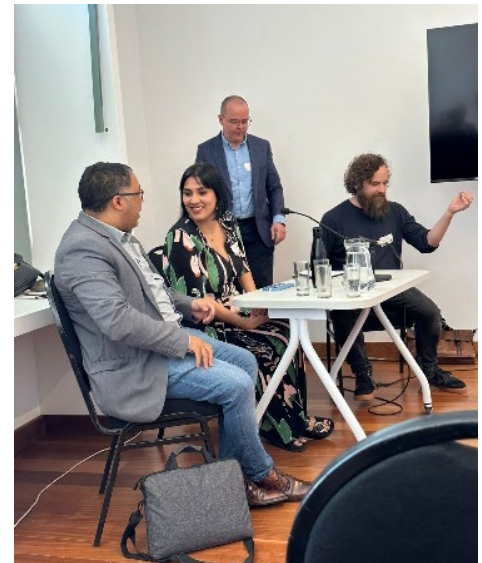
## Conferences, Seminars, and Workshops

### GAP16 (Ghent University) Annual Symposium

*University of the Western Cape, November 2023*

In November 2023, the annual symposium of the Africa Platform of Ghent University Association was jointly hosted at the University of the Western Cape. The theme of the symposium was knowledge production, research ethics, and authorship in African contexts. Together with Kris Rutten from UGhent, Scharnick-Udemans convened and participated in a roundtable discussion entitled “Opportunities and challenges of interdisciplinary research collaborations across the North-South nexus. The abstract for the roundtable follows below:

The first phase of the Strategic Institutional Partnership (SIP 1.0) between the University of the Western Cape and Ghent University focused on ‘turning diversity into capacity’. Starting from fundamental observations about the need and usefulness of cross-national, North/South-comparison around pressing social themes, including questions of how to theorise, investigate, and respond adequately to diversity, the Strategic Institutional Partnership aimed at developing a programme of North/South-exchange. During this roundtable discussion, we will explore the opportunities and challenges of setting up interdisciplinary research collaborations across the North-South nexus, building on the experience of past and on-going joint-PhD research projects. How can we build on these experiences to critically assess and, at the same time instigate North/South knowledge production and exchange? Which lessons have we learned to further develop ‘research pathways of South/North exchange in capacity and learning’ which will be the focus of the second phase of the Strategic Institutional Partnership between UWC and UGent (SIP 2.0).



Quentin Williams from the Centre for Multilingualism and Diversity Research (UWC) and Maurits Van Beever Donker from the Centre for Humanities Research (UWC) participated in the round table conversation chaired by Stef Slembrouck (UGhent), which inspired many questions regarding the ways in which North-South relationships are produced and maintained. The discussion also probed how various historical and contemporaneous arrangements of power and positionality have shaped the contours of the first SIP project while thinking collectively about how these issues can be addressed and resolved in SIP. 2.0. Two students from the DTC, Ishaya Anthony and Leona Morgan, already benefited tremendously from this partnership through the joint degree initiative as well as the exchange programme and we look forward to finding ways to extend the opportunities offered by this partnership to more students in the Centre.

### Abstract Writing Workshop

*Wesley House, Cambridge, February 2024*

Sarojini Nadar facilitated a workshop for PhD students and supervisors on how to write an abstract. The workshop objectives and goals are summarised below:

Writing an abstract is challenging because it requires condensing long and complex ideas into a succinct synopsis that captures only the main essences of a paper. Crafting an abstract requires the skills of balancing a comprehensive overview with a concise summary. This workshop on abstract writing, seeks to offer guidance for drafting effective and informative abstracts. It will



combine writing principles and practical exercises. Drawing on my many years of publishing experience, as well as supervising postgraduate dissertations, Nadar shared with participants some skills of summarising research, and conveying the key significance of their studies. The first part of the workshop was spent reviewing an existing abstract and dividing it into its component parts. Thereafter, some basic considerations for constructing an abstract were explored: purpose, structure, audience, key components and academic register. In the final part of the workshop, participants were asked to share an abstract that they are working on for collective review and input. All participants should bring along a 200-250 word abstract of either a proposal, or a dissertation (depending on what stage of their research they are at). Participants collectively reviewed one or two abstracts and provided input. At the end of this workshop, participants demonstrated an understanding of the importance of a well-crafted abstract in service of good scholarship.

## Public Scholarship

**Battle, Michael.** 2023. “Ubuntu,” Anniversary Book, International Greenbelt Festival, UK.

The Contemplative Life beyond Western Individualism with **Michael Battle** <https://youtu.be/AqvARk2cYTo>.

**Battle, Michael.** The Contemplative Leadership Speaker, “Prayer as Resistance: Contemplative Practices for Liberative Justice 2.0” Conference on Thursday, March 9 - Saturday, March 11, 2023, at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. <https://ccl.ptsem.edu/conference/#schedule>.

**Battle, Michael.** Ubuntu and Contemplative Prayer, Contemplative Prayer and Outreach Video, May 13 and 20, 2023.

**Battle, Michael.** African Christian Spirituality and Church Leadership, the Shalem Institute Video, July 21, 2023.

**Battle, Michael.** Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me, , Stanford University, October 30, 2023 <https://med.stanford.edu/contemplation/summit.html>.

**Battle, Michael.** Guided Meditation on Practicing Ubuntu, Stanford Contemplation by Design Summit Video, Tuesday Oct. 31, 2023 <https://med.stanford.edu/contemplation/summit.html>.

**Battle, Michael.** on Opening Minds, Opening Hearts [https://contemplativeoutreach.org/podcast/November 26](https://contemplativeoutreach.org/podcast/November%2026), 2023.

## Publications by Staff, Students, Fellows, and Associates

**Scharnick-Udemans, Lee.** 2023. Erasure, Exclusion, and Engagement: The Politics of Knowledge Production in The Study of (Indigenous) Religions. Roundtable discussion: “Rethinking Indigenous Religious Traditions with Jace Weaver”. *Indigenous Religious Traditions* 1(1) (51-89).

**Battle, Michael.** 2023. “Corporate Reconciliation,” Oxford University Press Handbook of the Book of Common Prayer.

**Battle, Michael.** 2023. “The Bad Habit of Personal Religion,” *Acta Theologica Special Section: On contemplating, celebrating, and continuing with Desmond Tutu’s lasting (theological) witness*.



# *Religion, Race, Politics, and African Religions*

*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 focuses on decolonial explorations of religion. 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 marginalised in the academy. Seemingly neglected areas of exploration in post-apartheid South Africa such as Black Theology and religious diversity are also explored. In addition, 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.*

## Graduate Research



### **“Tracing the epistemological foundations of African Traditional Religion: A decolonial exploration of David Chidester’s work”**

**Nobesuthu Tom**

**PhD Candidate**

**Final Stages of Completion**

Tom’s study expands on the body of work concerned with the epistemological foundations of African Traditional Religion. Epistemological shifts within the academy raise questions about knowledge: how it is produced, who produces, and why. In light of this “questioning”, the academic writings of acclaimed scholar, David Chidester, are used as a case study. The purpose of this study is to investigate; 1) What are the epistemological foundations of African Traditional Religion that can be traced in David Chidester’s work? 2) How and why were these epistemological foundations produced in the ways that they were? 3) What can be learned from the case study of a decolonial exploration of Chidester’s work on African Traditional Religion?



### **“Tinyiko Samuel Maluleke: An Intellectual Biography”**

**Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti**

**PhD Student**

**Pre-proposal phase**

The purpose of this research is to explore how Black theology finds expression in the public square through Tinyiko Samuel Maluleke’s intellectual work. As a research project that will be completed by publication, its main aim is to explore Tinyiko Samuel Maluleke’s Black Theology and what constitutes his public intellectual work. The purpose of this study is to explore; What is Tinyiko Samuel Maluleke’s Black Theology? 2) What constitutes Tinyiko Maluleke’s public intellectual work? 3) How does Black theology find expression in Tinyiko Samuel Maluleke’s public intellectual work? 4) Why is Tinyiko Samuel Maluleke’s public intellectual work framed in the ways that it is?



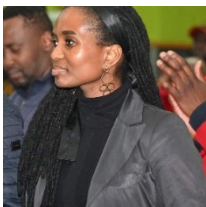
### **“#JesusToo? Reading the Matthean crucifixion narrative with Pinkster women on the Cape Flats”**

**Claudene Malony Sebolai**

**PhD Student**

**Pre-proposal phase**

The study explores how Pinkster women read and understand the Matthean crucifixion narrative based on their unique lived experiences. By centering the voices and perspectives of Pinkster women, a contribution will be made to a more comprehensive understanding of the crucifixion narratives and highlights the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and spirituality, in the context of social justice issues in the Cape Flats.



### **“Black Liberation Theology as a Tool of Decoloniality: An Ontological and Epistemological Argument”**

**Thozama Nozuko Mabusela**

**MA Candidate**

**Final Stages of Completion**

This project explores the development of Black Liberation Theology (BLT) in South Africa and considers its relationship to aspects of the Black Liberation Movement and the decolonial turn. The paper interrogates the tools and strategies that BLT draws on in its goal to achieve freedom from colonisation as a means of being and, as a framework of knowledge. It

asks together with Audre Lorde, "Can the master's tools ever dismantle the master's house?" Using decoloniality as a critical lens, the project seeks to explore ontologically and epistemologically, the history and development of BLT in South Africa.

## Conferences, Seminars, and Workshops

### Webinar: "Ecumenism & the role of the church during a time of socio-economic instability"

Online, May 2023



On 17 May 2023 Miranda Pillay participated in a panel discussion on the theme, "Ecumenism and the role of the church during a time of socio-economic instability".

This webinar event was organised by the Bible Society of South Africa. Pillay, one of four panelists presented a position paper focusing on the topic, "Social Justice: A Church Affair?". Here, she highlighted the fact that the call to re-read Biblical texts from a social justice perspective is a prophetic call that could be traced back to the Bible itself. Though some church communities and individuals may view social justice as "secular", the concept is not foreign to ecclesial communities – in ancient and contemporary contexts.

### Keynote Paper, International Asian Theologians Conference

Leicester, United Kingdom, June 2023



In her keynote address to this conference, entitled "Shades of Black: Exploring Asian Diaspora Theology" Sarojini Nadar explored the importance of situating and framing contextual theologies from the Global South, as Black theologies. Drawing on critical race theories and Black feminist epistemologies, she noted that this shift was significant, not just politically, but epistemologically as well.

### Plenary Paper, "The Future of Theology and Religious Studies, Valedictory Conference"

Vrije University, Amsterdam, July 2023



Sarojini Nadar presented a plenary paper at "The Future of Theology and Religious Studies, Valedictory Conference" on the occasion of the retirement of Eddy van Der Borcht, Desmond Tutu Chair at Vrije University. Her paper was entitled "Casting Stones at our own Houses: Exploring the Future of Religion and Theology in South Africa," and she argued that the future of the study of religion and theology in South Africa, depended on it becoming truly intersectional not just in race

and gender terms, but also in multi-religious terms.

### Visiting Scholar at the Tutu Centre

University of the Western Cape, July 2023



Between the 4 and 14 July, Lee Scharnick-Udemans, hosted Sahar Ahmed from the UCD Sutherland School of Law in Dublin Ireland. Ahmed had secured a Royal Irish Academy Charlemont Grant, which allowed her to travel to the Centre and the University of the Western Cape, to work with Scharnick-Udemans on the development of the theory of plurality, a form of understanding and interpreting International Human Rights Law (IHRL) on the Right to Freedom of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities. On the 11th of July, Ahmed conducted a seminar at the Centre with a selection of Masters and PhD students. She also met with the Dean of Arts and Humanities, Monwabisi Ralarala, with a view to discussing possibilities for collaboration across faculties and disciplines.

Thereafter, Scharnick-Udemans hosted a meeting with Tammy Wilks from the University of Cape Town to work on the development of a panel proposal for the 11th Annual African Consortium for Law and Religion Studies meeting, which will take place in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, in May 2024.

## DARE (Discerning and Radical Engagement) Forum

*Bangkok, Thailand, September 2023*



From 13-16 September 2023 Sarojini Nadar participated in the Discerning and Radical Engagement Forum in Bangkok, Thailand. The conference which began in 2017, seeks to gather academics and activists from around the world who are interested in critically engaging with how religion and matters of liberation and social justice intersect. As a member of the international steering group, Sarojini Nadar, blind reviewed abstracts prior to the conference, and co-lead one of the streams focusing on “new slaveries.” The outcome of this engagement will be an edited book project tentatively titled: "Enslaving Epistemologies and (Dis)Embodiments: Race, Religion and Gender." The book will be co-edited by Sarojini Nadar and Anna Kasafi Perkins from Jamaica, and will consist of 15 chapters that broadly focus on how epistemic injustices contribute to the ongoing marginalisation of people of colour in the academy, as well as real effects in social contexts across the world. The book will draw on insights from Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Pacific and North America.

## Keynote Paper, 4th Annual International Social Justice Summit

*Artscape, Cape Town, October 2023*



Sarojini Nadar was invited to give a keynote lecture at the 4th Annual International Social Justice Summit, by former public protector and director of the Stellenbosch University Centre for Social Justice, Thuli Madonsela. The theme of the conference was "The role of Business and Civil Society in Advancing Social Justice." Nadar's paper was entitled: "Philanthropy, Politics, Praxis: 3 models for advancing social justice through business and civil society." She began by amplifying the

absence of a focus on race and gender within the themes of the conference. The main argument of her paper was that approaches to social justice cannot be framed exclusively within philanthropy, but must be approached in terms of an intentional critical politics as well as a praxis-based approach.

## Webinar: “Religious Software Supporting and Maintaining the Occupation in Palestine”

*Online, November 2023*

As part of the ongoing social responsiveness work of the SARChI Chair in Religion and Social Justice, on Tuesday, 7 November 2023, the Centre convened a webinar entitled “Religious Software Supporting and Maintaining the Occupation in Palestine.”. The webinar was presented by the President of Dar-Al-Kalima University in Palestine, Mitri Raheb in conversation with Sarojini



Nadar. In his presentation, Raheb offered insights about how empire and settler colonialism shaped his experience, as well as the experiences of other Palestinians living under Israeli Occupation.



Strikingly, Raheb highlighted that a key to understanding the current context in Palestine is not only how empire provides the “hardware” in the form of military arms, but also how Christian seminaries and faith communities provide the “software” for occupation, through teaching and promoting dangerous Biblical interpretations and doctrine.

The event was opened by Rector of UWC, Tyrone Pretorius, who made several moving opening remarks, including encouraging all of us to “plead for peace, call for freedom, and petition for dignity.” Sarojini Nadar moderated an insightful discussion with over 100 people after the presentation.

## Church Responses to the War on Palestine

*Congregational Church, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), November 2023*



Miranda Pillay participated in a Webinar, “Church Responses to the War on Palestine”, hosted by the “SA Synod with the North End Congregational Church,” on 24 November 2023. In her presentation, Pillay focused on the history of Zionism with specific emphasis on Christian Zionism. She explained why ancient Israel (of the Bible) and the modern State of Israel “is not on a continuum” and explored how Christian Zionism, based on a literalist approach to reading the Bible, impacts church responses to the current war on Palestine. Pillay pointed out that most churches today understand sola scriptura to mean prima scriptura. That is, Scripture is the primary - but not the only factor that informs belief, faith and Christian doctrine. Thus, Scripture along with Christian tradition, reason and [lived]experience ought to be considered in Christian responses to the current war on Palestine.

## The International Conference on Inter-Asia and Challenges

*Institute of East Asian Studies, Thammasat University, November 2023*

This conference was co-hosted by multiple institutions including The Institute of East Asian Studies (Thammasat University, Thailand), Faculty of Liberal Arts (Thammasat University, Thailand), Asian Research Centre for Religion and Social Communication (St John's University, Thailand), Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (Mahidol University, Thailand), Faculty of Human Ecology (Universiti Putra, Malaysia), National Institute of Technology (Silchar, India), and Faculty of Creative Arts (University of Malaya). Lee Scharneck-Udemans was invited to participate in the opening plenary session and delivered a presentation entitled, “Religious Challenges in Africa: A Discussion of religious extremism and minority recognition/representation”. The abstract follows below:

Like Asia, Africa is heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, national identity, race, culture, politics as well as religious affiliation and belonging. This presentation identifies religious extremism and the recognition/representation of religious

minorities as two sites of conflict and contestation that have direct bearing on the state of religious freedom and plurality in Africa. Through examples drawn from Kenya and South Africa respectively, this presentation offers an overview of these religious challenges in Africa. With regards to the issue of religious extremism I will address how notions of religious diversity, religious deviance and dangerous religious beliefs and practices may be helpful for understanding, preempting and hopefully avoiding tragic events that may be attributed to the weaponization of religion. In this regard the Shakahola Massacre, which took place in Kenya in early 2023 will be referenced as an example. The recognition/representation of religious minorities will be discussed within the context of the persistent cultural and political privilege of Christianity in South Africa, a multi-religious, multicultural, secular democratic state. In conclusion, I draw on examples from the South and South East Asian region to map commonalities and to suggest that issues around religious extremism and religious minority recognition/ representation pose similar challenges for both contexts.

## Reimagining Contemporary Africa: Circulations of objects, knowledges & spiritual practices

*Department of Anthropology, University of the Western Cape, 24 and 25 January 2024*

This workshop brought together scholars and students working on a variety of topics in religion and theology including, Neo-Paganism, African indigenous religions, traditional healing, alternative religious practices and Islam. The days were filled with presentations and roundtable discussions most of which challenged the academic-activism binary while advancing critical engagement with the meaning and utility of the researcher-participant dynamic and exchange. Lee Scharnick-Udemans was invited to chair a panel entitled: “Re-imagining African Selves: Histories and Art” on the second day of the workshop. This was a wonderful opportunity to learn more about how other disciplines are approaching the study of African religions and religions in Africa. Given the Centre’s transdisciplinary orientations towards producing and promoting African scholarship, the workshop also elucidated opportunities for more concerted collaboration between religion, theology and anthropology.

## Community Engagement

### Cape Talk

Lee Scharnick-Udemans was invited as an expert on Religious Pluralism and Diversity, to participate in a live telephonic interview with presenter Zain Jacobs to speak about the significance of the Passover, Easter, and Ramadan period for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

“Why this is an important time for Christians, Muslims and Jews” April 2023

<https://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/471020/why-this-is-an-important-time-for-christians-muslims-and-jews>

### Al Jazeera

Lee Scharnick-Udemans appeared on an on-screen pre-recorded interview for the Listening Post, a weekly media analysis show for Al Jazeera English, London. She spoke on the relationships between media, deviance, danger and new religious movements.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdlw3M6HuA>

## Vatican News

Ishaya Anthony was interviewed by Jean-Benoit Harel and Christopher Wells of the Vatican News about religious violence in Northern Nigeria. Anthony's comments included reflections on the role of ecumenism in encouraging and facilitating peaceful coexistence.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2024-01/anglican-highlights-ecumenism-in-response-to-violence-in-nigeria.html>

## Public Scholarship

Michael Battle, African Christian Spirituality and Church Leadership, the Shalem Institute Video, July 21, 2023

Battle, Michael. 2023. "Transnational Solidarity, Israel/Palestine, and Intellectual Legacies of Desmond Tutu," *Contending Modernities*, University of Notre Dame, <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu>.

Battle, Michael. African Christian Spirituality and Church Leadership, the Shalem Institute Video, July 21, 2023.

## Publications by Staff, Students, Fellows, and Associates

**Beydoun, Khaled A.** 2023. *The New Crusades: Islamophobia and the Global War on Muslims* (Univ. of California Press) <https://www.amazon.com/New-Crusades-Islamophobia-Global-Muslims/dp/0520356306>.

**Beydoun, Khaled A.** 2023. On Terrorists and Freedom Fighters (Harvard Law Review) <https://harvardlawreview.org/forum/no-volume/on-terrorists-and-freedom-fighters/>.

**Isaacs, Dane.**, Groenewald, Candice., and Moolman, Benita. 2023. Stuttering and social change: Moving Towards a Critical Disability Studies Approach in South Africa. In Rajendra Baikady, Sajid SM, Varoshini Nadesan, Jaroslaw Przeperski, M. Rezaul Islam, Gao Jianguo (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Change*. (Switzerland: Springer Nature).

# *Religion, Ecology, and Economy*

*This thematic focus area foregrounds the connections between anthropocentric and androcentric discourses, as well as the dynamism between economic exploitation and other forms of oppression and marginalisation. It explores how religion, environment, and economy intersect and connect with culture, politics, community, heritage, and indigenous knowledge systems. This thematic focus area interrogates religion's entanglements within the institutionalisation of economic oppression and examines the resources available within religion to destabilise prevailing imbalances of economic power. Both environmental and economic justice are linked to moral principles which support the possibilities for people to live dignified material lives rooted in creativity and productivity.*



## Graduate Research



**“Defiant Seed: tracing narratives of women and seed within the context of indenture in South Africa”**

**Pralini Naidoo**

**PhD Candidate**

**Final Completion Stage**

Defiant seed is an exploration into the relationships between women and food seed within the context of indenture. Woven into my own questions around land, food, seed and heritage, are the lived realities of other women who, not only, share a proximity to seeds and growing, but descend from an indentured labour force. Embedded within this collection of narratives are the ways in which current systems infringe on the freedoms of seed and women, and how historical systems of oppression find new ways to erase and invisibilise ways of knowing and being. A pivotal question remains: How, if at all, do the subjugated – seed and women – find their way towards love and to a wild, autonomous birthright, beyond systems of oppression? This thesis begins on the premise that indenture is not a historic relic but an incursion whose repercussions and ghosts still affect the South African landscape and its peoples. Using the masters’ records and historical narratives as clues, I search for the particular, the ancestral, the spiritual, and the relational, within our stories, to disrupt what has been documented as fact. In fleshing out these lived narratives as poems, questions, and stories, and not objective singular facts, there lives the hope that multiple and defiant re-stories are possible.



**“Constructing and Conserving the Urban Sacred’: A decolonial-feminist exploration of Urban Sacred Natural Sites”**

**Rifqah Tifloen**

**Masters Candidate**

**Data collection and writing up phase**

Rifqah's research examines how urban sacred natural sites in South Africa are conceptualised and which knowledges are legitimized. Using critical discourse analysis, and engaging two case studies, this project seeks to examine to what extent indigenous religions and cultural belief systems inform ideas and understandings of urban sacred natural sites, and to interrogate how colonial forms of knowledge production may disregard, minimise or trivialise indigenous knowledge regarding conservation. Despite existing legislation, urban sacred natural spaces in South Africa suffer from pollution and development threats that negatively affect biodiversity as well as undermine the cultural significance of the site.

## Conferences, Seminars, and Workshops

### The 38th German Protestant Kirchentag

*Nuremberg, Germany, June 2023*

In June 2023, Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti participated in a panel discussion at the German Protestant Kirchentag. The 38<sup>th</sup> German Protestant Kirchentag occurred in Nuremberg, Germany from 7 to 11 June 2023, Koloti’s panel sat on the 8th of June. Guided by the biblical theme “Now is the time” (Mark 1:15), Koloti spoke at a panel that addressed what hope means given the ecological crises we now live in. In his address, Koloti mainly highlighted that ecological issues cannot be treated as a shared responsibility between the global North and the Global South because of the prevailing planet-wide problem of environmental racism. Arguing that eco-theology ought to be contextual to local contexts. Koloti stated “There is a need for a global southern

eco-theology that will speak to and for the needs of the people in the global south. This event was held in-person however due to VISA application issues provisions were made for Koloti to participate virtually. Koloti's participation as the only doctoral student, on a panel with all professors, demonstrates the high regard with which he is held in these circles, and bodes well for his development as a theologian and scholar.

### Third Biennial EcoJustice Conference

*Iiff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado, September 2023*

MA student, Rifqah Tifloen had her paper, "Green Colonialism: false solutions and “grammars” of displacement" accepted for an international conference via competitive submission. This was the abstract for her paper:

In climate change spaces, nature-based solutions have been positioned as a mega-solution to fighting climate change and the subsequent food security challenges that will arise as a result of the already massive impacts on agriculture. In reality, nature-based solutions are arguably used as a weapon by those in power to lock in African governments into more debt through loans and unfavourable trade agreements and may create the enabling environments for neo-imperialist food regimes to continue unchallenged.

The discourses surrounding UNFCCC's 'nature-based solutions' have been controversial within frontline/indigenous communities owing to its vague and loose definition and being offered as a catch-all solution to climate change that is deeply embedded in market-based mechanisms such as biodiversity and carbon offsetting. The climate crisis demands a serious change in our relationship with nature, more protection of nature, alongside other demands, such as the recognition of indigenous land and cultural rights. There can be no climate justice without social justice and recognition of prior harms. The purpose of this paper is to explore through decolonial eco-feminist lenses, how 'nature-based solutions' are conceptualised in general but also specifically within the food systems context. The aim is to examine to what extent indigenous religions and cultural belief systems inform ideas and understandings of 'nature-based solutions', and to interrogate how colonial forms of knowledge production may disregard, minimise or erase indigenous knowledge regarding conservation. Using Kathryn Yusoff's framework of the three “grammars”: “grammars of capture, grammars of extraction and grammars of displacement”, this paper will interrogate to what extent deference to scientific social discourse allows whiteness to continue colonising African small-scale farmers in the name of development.

## Publications by Staff, Students, Fellows, and Associates

**Tifloen, Rifqah.** 2023. 32: A Wounded Landscape and the Right to Protest at the River Club Site in *Poverty and Prejudice: Religious Inequality and the Struggle for Sustainable Development* eds. Mariz Tadros, Philip Mader, and Kathryn Cheeseman. (Bristol University Press: Bristol). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529229066.ch032>.

**Naidoo, Pralini.** 2022. 'Joy in the Dirt: Discovering Indenture's Wild Places'. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 7 (2): 369–88. <https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29688>.

**Naidoo, Pralini.** 2023. 'Greener on the Other Side: Tracing Stories of Amaranth and Moringa through Indenture'. *Agenda* 37 (1): 102–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2023.2183138>.

**Naidoo, Pralini.** 2023. "The Unwritten: Exploring Food Stories Beyond and Between the Lines", *Matatu* 54 (1): 107-123.

**Battle, Michael.** 2023. “Transnational Solidarity, Israel/Palestine, and Intellectual Legacies of Desmond Tutu,” *Contending Modernities*, University of Notre Dame, <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu>.

Groenewald, Candice., **Isaacs, Dane**, and Mafanato, Maluleka. 2023. “It Doesn’t Cure, but It Protects”: COVID-19 Vaccines through the Eyes of Children and Their Parents. *Vaccines*, 11(1305). <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines11081305>.

## ACADEMIC SERVICE

In addition to their primary work in the Centre, staff also participated in various academic citizenship activities, within, and beyond UWC in the year 2023/2024.

### Sarojini Nadar

Journal Editor	African Journal of Gender and Religion
Editorial Board Member	Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion Feminist Studies in Religion Book Series Journal of Africana Religions Women Studies International Forum
Committee Member	Mandela Rhodes Scholarship Selection
Special Advisor	Gender Advisory Group, World Council of Churches
Member of UWC Committees	Faculty of Arts and Humanities Research Committee Faculty Management Committee Senate Member University Council Member Executive Member: University Council
Masters External Examination	University of Cape Town
PhD External Examiner	Vrije University, Amsterdam University of the West Indies
Council Member	Advisory Council on National Orders, Office of the Presidency
Steering Committee Member	World Forum on Liberation and Theology Discerning and Radical Engagement Forum (Council for World Mission)

### Lee Scharnick-Udemans

Co-Editor	Journal for the Study of Religion
Editorial Board Member	Indigenous Religious Traditions (Equinox) African Journal of Gender and Religion African Consortium of Law and Religion
Reviewer	Social Compass
Executive Member	Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa
Member of UWC Committees	Arts Higher Degrees Committee



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	Arts Higher Degrees Committee Proposal Sub-Committee Arts Research Committee
Co-Chair	Religion and Theology - Desmond Tutu Centre Higher Degrees Committee
Masters External Examination	Department of Religion, University of Johannesburg
External Examiner	Department for the Study of Religion, University of Cape Town

### **Miranda Pillay**

Reviewer	African Journal of Gender and Religion Scriptura Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa
NRF Rating Reviewer	Rating was submitted by a peer in the field of New Testament Studies and Hermeneutics.
Judge	Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu Book Prize
PhD Thesis Proposal Review	
Masters Thesis Examination	Department of Sociology, University of the Western Cape