

# Editorial

**Johan M. Strijdom**  
**strijdm@unisa.ac.za**

**Lee-Shae S. Scharnick-Udemans**  
**lscharnickudemans@uwc.ac.za**

If location and multi-disciplinarity have become key terms in the contemporary study of religion, the articles in this issue illustrate these initiatives. Written from an African location by researchers from diverse disciplines, the essays contribute to the debate on critical issues in the intersection between religion, politics, society, and gender.

This issue opens appropriately, 25 years after the Rwandan genocide, with an article by Philippe Denis on ‘Christian *gacaca* and official *gacaca* in post-genocide Rwanda’. As an initiative of the Catholic Church to bring about reconciliation between communities divided by the 1994 genocide, the article discusses the pastoral role of the Christian *gacaca*, relating it to the judicial processes followed by the *gacaca* or popular courts established by the Rwandan state.

In the second article, ‘Religious freedom and the law: A reality or pipe dream for prisoners in South Africa?’ H. Puleng Motlalekgosi assesses whether the human rights ideal of freedom of religion, enshrined by the South African Constitution and written into South African law, has been promoted, protected, and realized in South African prisons. Based on annual reports of the Department of Correctional Services and general conditions in South African prisons, the analysis points to the violation of the right of prisoners to freedom of religion by the South African correctional authority.

In ‘A mall intercept survey on religion and worldview in the Cape Flats of Cape Town, South Africa’ Thomas J. Farrar, Khanyisane A. Falake, Adriel

Mebaley, Mandisi D. Moya, and Ivor I. Rudolph, on the basis of data obtained from a mall intercept survey of visitors to five shopping centers, took into account demographic characteristics, measures of religiosity and religious pluralism, participation in religious activities, and supernaturalism, to offer a statistical analysis of worldviews and religious beliefs and practices in the Cape Flats area of Cape Town, South Africa. They found that, in terms of the variables that they used, the majority (69.4%) of respondents self-identified as Christian, with diverse denominational affiliations, whereas 16.4% self-identified with African Traditional Religion, 11.7% with Islam, and only 1.6% as non-religious. The latter percentage is smaller than estimations for Cape Town as a whole or South Africa nationally. We hope that this kind of statistical analysis might in future be refined in terms of categories, questions, and critique to contribute to the understanding of religion within South African contexts.

Turning our attention to changes that came about in African indigenous religion due to colonial interventions, Sepetla Molapo in ‘Cast as written: Protestant missionaries and their translation of molimo as the Christian God in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Southern Africa’ shows how the encounter between these colonial missionaries and Sotho speakers transformed molimo as a material concept into an interior one. This departure, he argues, resulted in privileging space over time, since casting molimo in writing brought about the end of a way of life that had prioritized speech.

In the concluding article “‘Sanctifying sex’: Exploring “indecent” sexual imagery in Pentecostal liturgical practices’, Sarojini Nadar and Johnathan Jodamus begin by acknowledging the serious consequences of Pentecostalism’s conservative Puritan sexual ethics. Based on a body-spirit dualism, it marks sex in general as ‘indecent’, and represses sexual practices by strictly policing bodies. It typically encourages safer sexual practice and abstinence outside of marriage, forces young people into early marriages to avoid ‘living in sin’, and ascribes teenage pregnancies to disobedience to the church’s teaching on sex and contraceptives. They continue, however, to challenge this ‘repressive hypothesis’ by exploring the possibility that within Pentecostal spaces sexuality is not simply censored, but rechanneled. If Foucault challenged the repressive thesis by arguing that so-called repressed sexuality finds appropriate expressions in spaces such as psychiatry and prostitution, Nadar

and Jodamus maintain that Pentecostalism might be seen as offering another outlet in its marking of bodies in liturgical rituals, its songs and performances, its deliverance practices, and a blasphemy case. Not only do these signify erotic relations between the divine and the believer that open up the possibility of more embodied and ‘sexed’ experiences of the divine, but they might also expand ways in which sexual relations between humans are shaped and could become destigmatized by providing critical spaces of embodied ‘sexual healing’ that Pentecostals have not yet explored.

Tammy Wilks, in her review of *Taking offense: Religion, art and visual culture in plural configurations*, edited by Christiane Kruse, Birgit Meyer, and Anne-Marie Korte (2018), appreciates this recent contribution to material religion for its interdisciplinary approach that demonstrates how collaborative research beyond religious studies that involve sociology, art history, museum studies, and other fields, can produce innovative knowledge and prompt researchers to refine their theories to think critically about the complex and dynamic phenomenon of images that offend.

We would, finally, like to thank the contributors for their articles, the peer-reviewers for their constructive comments, and our copyeditor, Willem Oliver, for his meticulous work.

**Editor-in-chief**

Johan M. Strijdom  
Department of Religious Studies and Arabic  
University of South Africa  
strijdm@hotmail.com; strijdm@unisa.ac.za

**Managing editor**

Lee-Shae S. Scharnick-Udemans  
Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice  
University of the Western Cape  
lscharnickudemans@uwc.ac.za