Tracing 19th-Century Scientific Racism and its Implications for Contemporary Gender Discourses of Religion in South Africa

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Joshua 1:9

For my precious late mother, Nozipho Fela, whose great love still nurtures my existence and holds me together. I could not have asked for a better mother than you *Mamam.* For my father, Simon Fela, and his resilient efforts toward my dreams and aspirations, I hope I do all that brings you pride. For *abantwana bakaMamam,* my brothers Thobani (late) and Asenoxolo, and our amazing Liefie who ascended to doggie heaven too soon, I will deeply love you three till the rivers all run dry.

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Abstract

This study hypothesizes that current Christian religious discourses and attitudes toward the black female body, such as religious identity marked through sexuality, purity culture, (in)fertility rituals, menstruation and the exclusion from communion or prayers, have been influenced and informed by 19th-century scientific assumptions of the black female body as 1) source of pollution, 2) hypersexual/oversexed, and 3) unruly and feral. These scientific assumptions of the black female body can be said to be the genesis of our current realities as (black) women in South Africa of gender-based violence, sexual assault and femicide (Roberts, 1997; Baderoon, 2014).

In postcolonial South Africa, the black female body continues to be seen as the measure of moral order, and social order, conversion and civility are maintained through the regulation of (black) women's sexuality. How the black female body and sexuality are defined and controlled using Western and Christian religious discourse calls for the need for a decolonial feminist lens to make sense of the present by searching the past in hopes of constructing a new narrative about the black female body and a new hope for black women living in a world not meant for them.

In this study, I am interested in tracing how the Church in South Africa viewed and still views the black female body through the lens of 19th-century scientific racism and sexism. To unearth the interconnections of race, science, and religion regarding the black female body, my study uses the feminist philosophy of science as a framework. Employing feminist philosophy of science will enable the study to illuminate the Black female as a gendered body, how 19th-century science has commodified, dehumanized, hypersexualized, and exploited this gendered body and how the colonial classifications of race and black(ness) have played a significant role in this.

Drawing on selected colonial texts and scholars, I hope to show how their ideas shaped how people thought about race, gender and religion in the colonial period. As its methodology, my study employs Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). This methodology hones on social justice issues and transformation. Similar to the aims of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, my research hopes to challenge current Christian religious discourses that subordinate black women and repress their agency and autonomy in the name of culture and religion.

DECLARATION

I, Siphosethu Fela (Student Number: 216056843), declare that:

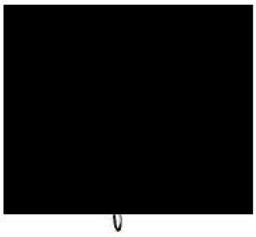
1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work and it has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

2. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, tables, graphs or other information unless specifically acknowledged. Where other written sources have been quoted, authors' words have been re-written and other information attributed to them were properly referenced and placed in quotation marks.

3. The references section contains details of the sources used and is adequately acknowledged.

Date: 24 March 2025

Siphosethu Fela



Prof Federico Settler (Supervisor)

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This study takes a look at Victorian science and religion. I seek to investigate the scientific assumptions of the black female body as hypersexual, deviant and animalistic (Gilman, 1985), as subhuman, as both sites of revulsion and attraction (Baderoon, 1994), as bodies to sexually exploit, commodify and dehumanize, to dissect and put on display for the European gaze (Parkinson, 2016). I aim to uncover how science has and continues to be used as a method of 'othering', with the view that "…science cannot be disassociated from the ways in which blackness is read in the past or the present" (McKittrick, 2010:118). For centuries black women's bodies were considered (a) contaminated and containers of disease, (b) unruly but fertile, (c) oversexed, and at the same time asexual and masculine, these old ideas about black women's bodies persist even today (Roberts, 1997). These ideas about black women's bodies not only persist in public policy in Western countries such as the United States of America, for instance, the policy of arresting poor pregnant black women who smoked crack (a policy initiated by state officials in Charleston, South Carolina in 1989) and the reproductive regulation of black motherhood through mandatory contraception methods such as the insertion of Norplant as necessary condition for receiving state aid (Roberts, 1997), but it also continues to persist in religious discourses related to women's bodies – menstruation and the exclusion from communion or prayers, (in)fertility rituals and virginity testing, sexuality and the measuring of the buttocks and labia (Gilman, 1985), menopause and witch-hunting. These threats to black women's autonomy are underscored by scientific ideas about the black female body as mysterious at best and unruly and vile at worst (Gilman, 1985).

Nineteenth-century science hones in on the black female body by identifying it as a racially inferior sexual object (Roberts, 1970; McKittrick, 2010) and less than human, a perspective that European science used to create entitlement (and superiority) through othering (Abrahams, 1997). "The development of European 'science' required the development of an ‘other' which would embrace all the attributes of Satan in their minds" (Abrahams, 1997:38). These satanic attributes included deviance and hypersexuality, and the justification science used was the perceived overdevelopment of the "primitive" genitals of black women (Gilman,

1985:213). To 19th-century European scientists, the notion that black woman had an overdeveloped clitoris and a hymen that "is not at the entrance to the vagina, as in the white woman, but from one-and-a-half to 2 inches from its entrance in the interior", they argued, were to be viewed as "...one of the anatomical marks of the non-unity of the races" (Turnipseed, 1877 in Gilman, 1985:216). The supposed difference between the oversexed black woman and the chaste white woman is an example of how "the white identity is created and maintained by decorating black bodies with disdain, over and over again"; "whites return and return and return again to this fetish in order to satisfy a self-created urge to be white", furthermore, the fascination with the black (female) body "...is a pleasure which is satisfied through the production, circulation, and consumption of the images of the not-white" (Farley, 1997:463).

Sarah Baartman, a South African woman who was taken to Europe to entertain the gaze of white public and private audiences (McKittrick, 2010), centuries after her death, continues to be a stark reminder of the genital preoccupation of white men and imperial science on the black female body (Abrahams, 1997). The white eye and its obsession with hypersexualising the black body and the use of science as justification points to how Europeans convinced themselves of their right to not just ownership of African land, but African bodies as well. Indeed, "the white men created an image of themselves as entitled, and an image of Africa and Africans as existing only to be possessed" (Abrahams, 1997:37). This perceived intrinsic white superiority over Africa and Africans explains the dehumanization, objectification, and commodification of Sarah Baartman during her life in Europe and well after her death. While alive "She was placed on a podium, poked, prodded and, measured 'by every contrivance'" (Abrahams, 1997:44) and not even death could spare her from the white imperial gaze and hands, because after her death Baartman was cut open, dismembered, and her body put in glasses for further scientific exploitation (Abrahams, 1997).

The Victorian era was full of efforts to classify the world into classes and species. Taxonomy, the act of classifying, naming, and ordering was the epitome of 18th and 19th-century science (Abrahams, 1997), and Carl Linnaeus was a pioneer in the science of classification, starting his work in 1735 in the *Systema Naturae,* dividing the world into three kingdoms; animal, plant and mineral (*Linnaeus and Race (easy read),* n.d). Linnaeus' descriptive system divided humans into four subgroups, from superior to inferior - Europeans, Asians, Native Americans and Africans, this taxonomy not just classified but introduced a hierarchy (Abrahams, 1997).

Other White European scholars who sought to make sense of the world and differences through taxonomy include but are not limited to Charles Darwin, Francis Galton and Georges Cuvier, with Cuvier arguing the black female is inherently different due to her physiognomy, skin tone and genitalia (Gilman, 1985).

The Victorian era's scientific assumptions and conceptions of the black female body have influenced almost every aspect of postcolonial African societies, and also informed even current Christian religious discourses on gender in South Africa. These scientific assumptions of the black female body can be said to be the genesis of our current realities as (black) women in South Africa whose everyday lives are characterised by relentless gender-based violence, sexual assault and femicide (Baderoon, 2014). In Victorian times women were regarded as antithesis to the superior, logical and progressive White European male (Gilman, 1985) and black women in particular were often considered containers of disease and corruption, associated with syphilophobia (McClintock, 1995; Gilman, 1985).

This study's focus on the Victorian era, and how it has shaped postcolonial South Africa, is significantly informed by the region being a former British colony. Race, sex and gender are colonial constructs (Tamale, 2020) and our current conceptions of these three categories are to a significant degree, forged in the fires of colonialism. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:487) asserts, "The present predicaments of Africa are often not a matter of personal choice: they arise from a historical situation". How the black female body and sexuality are defined, regulated and represented in South Africa, is thus also partly a product of the colonizing religious institutions of Western and Christian religious discourse. Thus, calls for a decolonial feminist lens to make sense of the present by searching the past, hopes to construct new narratives about the black female body and a new hope for black women living in a world not meant for them.

The return and revival of race science, the notion that specific races (normally white) are intrinsically superior and more intelligent and capable than other races (Evans, 2018), and the emergence of (not so) new religious registers about gender, indicate that contemporary discourses about black women's bodies, and the disciplining and regulation of these bodies in religious spaces especially, has its roots and origins in the 19th-century science about race and gender, and not simply contemporary religious dogma as some may argue. Modern science still carries the prints of colonialism (Roy, 2018) and how the black female body is viewed,

treated and discussed in religious discourses is a regurgitation and reinforcement of the scientific and colonial lens of the black female body.

The entanglement of religion and colonialism/imperial science is demonstrated by the entanglement of the state and the church, often characterized by the constraints placed on the black person's bodily rights in colonial South Africa (Settler and Engh, 2015). Armed with imperial scientific assumptions of the black female body as inherently polluting and immoral, the colonial church sought to contain black women's sexuality by advocating virginity and banning polygamy as spaces of sexual promiscuity. Similarly, today, churches mark women's modesty by forcing them to wear different uniforms to church – and each distinctive and symbolically loaded uniform reflects who are virgins, wives or widows (thus denoting black women's religious and moral standing in terms of sexual relations and hierarchies).

The religious reaction (past and present) to the black female body is marked by regulation and control through notions of purity i.e sexual abstinence until marriage (Mbotho, Cilliers & Akintola 2013), menstruation and participation in religious ritual (Frimpong 2011), women being isolated during periods of pregnancy and mourning, and religious ecstasy in religious spaces being met with suspicion and often accused of witchcraft (Kgatla 2020). Indeed, "what has historically often been viewed as a Western scientific project to grasp the African mentality or sexuality, must also be seen in relation to the various ways that indigenous polities and colonial mission have been embroiled in the policing and domestication of black women's bodies" (Settler and Engh, 2015:130). In postcolonial South Africa, the black female body continues to be seen as the measure of moral order, and social order, conversion and civility are maintained through the regulation of (black) women's sexualities. The regulation of the black female body and sexuality can be seen on both Christian religious and indigenous cultural fronts, the former through purity myths and the latter through virginity testing. Stark examples of the regulation of black women's bodies include; in 2013 Swazi chiefs threatened to ban women who wore trousers and miniskirts from participating in the national elections, and in the same year Zimbabwean police initiated a campaign aimed at removing female sex workers from Harare (Settler and Engh, 2015). These regulations of the (black) female body, are underpinned and informed by missionary and colonial discourses that established a correlation between the black body and sin, filth and disease (Settler and Engh, 2015). Colonial imperial science fetishized the black female body as diseased, hypersexual, and fertile, but also embodied savage sexualities that jeopardized the moral and

social order (Settler and Engh, 2015). In this study, I hope to explore the extent to which current Christian religious discourses of the black female body are rooted in this colonial and imperial fetishization.

1.2 Motivation

My research is motivated by three things: (1) our South African context of gender-based violence against women and children, femicide, sexual and physical abuse, and the sheer disregard of black female bodies. (2) The Christian religious obsession with regulating the bodies and sexualities of black women under the guise of so-called 'purity' and morality – which ultimately serves to deny female sexuality and pleasure. (3) I am drawn to the meeting of science and religion, and where the two intersect; how they dialogue and are commensurate. My research is the unification and exploration of all three interests, and at the centre of them is the black female body that calls upon me to pay attention to it.

Gender-based violence, sexual abuse, purity culture, objectification and hypersexualization, and murder, are some of the cruel realities that we are subjected to in our everyday lives as black women in South Africa. Underpinning these lived experiences, I think, is the need to regulate our bodies, sexualities, and being. The black woman's experience brings to the fore the perceived subhumanness of the female body, its low value and the lack of personhood associated with it. I am reminded of Karabo Mokoena, Tshepang Pitse, and Uyinene Mrwetyana, whose sole sin was being female-bodied and black. "In South Africa today, thousands of women are subjected to violence in their homes, workplaces and communities that threatens their life and indirectly that of their children" (Haddad, 2003:149). In a world not designed for black women, how do we not just exist but thrive? How do we rebel against subordination? What do we do to live our lives as close to liberation as we can? I think before we can answer these questions, we need first to unearth and discover what has informed our current realities of violence against our bodies and beings. This study is motivated by such an exercise.

To effectively confront our lived experiences laced with violence and disgust, exploitation, and dehumanization, it is beneficial to revisit history – as ugly as it may be, to understand our present. I think, with knowledge and understanding we can then effectively carve out ways of moving forward, against all odds. As Flint (2008:156) affirms, "African women have been

surviving against the odds for centuries and […], like Hagar in the wilderness, have "made a way out of no way". Certainly, we can become agents and subjects of our lives (Chung, 1996 in Haddad, 2003), bodies, and sexualities. This study is an attempt towards that direction.

1.3 Objectives

My objectives in the research are:

1. To explore the epistemic and theological effects 19th-century scientific assumptions of the (black) female body had on Christian religious discourses on gender.
2. To understand how 19th-century scientific assumptions influenced and informed the Christian colonization of Southern Africa?
3. To examine what constructions of gender, and assumptions about African religiosity emerged from 19th-century discourses of science.
4. To analyse the different ways that 19th-century discourses of science inform contemporary construction of gender and religion colonial and postcolonial in South Africa.

1.4 Research Questions

To meet my objectives, I pose the following questions in my study:

1. What epistemic and theological effects have 19th-century scientific assumptions of the (black) female body had on Christian religious discourses on gender?
2. How have 19th-century scientific assumptions influenced and shaped the Christian colonization of Southern Africa?
3. What constructions of gender, and assumptions about African religiosity emerged in 19th-century discourses of science?
4. How did the 19th-century discourses of science inform the construction of gender and religion colonial and postcolonial in South Africa?

1.5 Research Overview

My study is an exploration of how 19th-century Victorian scientific assumptions and conceptions of the black body have influenced or informed current religious discourses on gender in South Africa. I seek to uncover how, and in what ways, these scientific assumptions were applied to the black female body in particular, with the interest of making visible how science, race and religion co-constructed ideas about gender that persist in faith communities today. I am interested in tracing how the 19th-century scientific assumptions of the black (female) body as (1) oversexed or hypersexual, (2) a source of pollution, and (3) unruly, therefore, needing control or regulation, have influenced and informed the Christian colonization of South Africa? In other words, how did the Church in South Africa end up viewing the black female body through the lens of 19th-century scientific racism?

The 19th-century science was entangled with imperial requirements, and that science "…gave Europeans intellectual as well as actual authority over colonial environments by classifying and ultimately containing their awesome dimensions" (Chidester. 2014:3). Additionally, "in its practical effects, imperial science was an important element in Europe's "grid of cultural, political, economic, and military domination" (Chidester, 2014:3). South Africa was considered to be "the culture-bed of Imperialism" (Chidester, 2014:8), useful in demonstrating the racial superiority of Europeans over savage Africans. "Visiting South Africa in 1905, the British Association for the Advancement of Science entered a field of circulations – indigenous, colonial, and imperial – that were crucial to the production of knowledge in all of the sciences as well as within the empire of religion" (Chidester, 2014:31), the knowledge produced in the sciences shaped the knowledge produced in religion i.e Christianity. Religion and science came together in the imperial project, "they worked within the same imperial horizon, which Max Muller beheld in his vision of Queen Victoria's throne, of "a whole Empire stretching out" from center to periphery, from history to prehistory, absorbing the entire world" (Chidester, 2014:89).

Before the Christian colonization of South Africa, during the nineteenth century in Europe, science began to have the upper hand over religion, this meant that Christianity

had to adapt to scientific theories (Lightman, 2022). Scientific ideas then became absorbed into religion, including scientific racism and the assumptions of the black body as animalistic and inferior, and the black female body as oversexed, polluted, and unruly were absorbed into the Christian religion. The Christian colonization of South Africa not only meant the exportation of the Bible to African soil but also included the 19th-century scientific assumptions of the black female body as inherently vulgar and needing regulation.

Before the onset of the Christian colonization of South Africa, Colonialists denied Africans of religion, "European travelers testified to the remarkable finding that there were people [such as the Hottentot, Xhosa, and Zulu] who had no religion" (Chidester, 1996:11).The lack of religion meant the lack of civilization and industry, "the notion of the "lazy savage" was an immediate correlate of the absence of religion" (Chidester, 1996:15). By denying Africans of religion, Europeans denied indigenous people entitlement to their land because of their meek and superstitious minds (Chidester, 1996). Interestingly, "when the existence of a religion could not be categorically denied, […], it could be demonized by being explained as the worship of the Devil" (Chidester, 1996:12), this was the fate of African cultures and religions in the face of colonial rule.

"Once contained under colonial control, an indigenous population was found to have its own religious system. Ironically, however, the religion discovered was the same as the religion denied" (Chidester, 1996:19). Upon the discovery of religion among Africans, Christianity remained the 'true' religion in the missionary mind, Africans had to be saved from their magical and primitive superstitions and ancestor worship to a religion of civilization and humanity. As mentioned before, imperial science and imperial religion worked together in the colonization of African people.

Science informed the mission of Christian narratives about African people and African women through the absorption of scientific theories and ideas into Christianity in 19thcentury Europe. The Christian colonization of South Africa introduced these scientific assumptions in and outside the Church. The 19th-century scientific assumptions of the black female body as oversexed, polluted, and unruly therefore needing regulation manifested in the mission Christian response of purity culture and sexual abstinence before marriage, physical and immaterial cleanliness in and outside the Church, and the

view of African cultures and religions as satanic and savage. The colonizers and missionaries were of the view that "it is […] impossible to expect these [African] barbarous tribes to become civilized unless they are converted to Christianity" (Grey, 1847:416 in Flint, 2008:110). In converting Africans to Christianity, the missionary and colonial aim was for the new converts to adopt the British cultural tenets, “this included different ideas about gender, community, law, and what constituted proper behaviour” (Grey, 1847:416 in Flint, 2008:110). The missionary and colonial juxtaposition of "Europe" to "Africa" " white to Black, Pure and evil was the British convincing themselves that their culture was civilized and progressive and thus desirable (Flint, 2008). Biblical texts in the Old Testament and its references to the expectations of women to be ‘pure’ and virgins, and the practice of virginity testing in South Africa (Bruce, 2003) resemble the 19th-century scientific assumptions and attitudes toward the black female body as intrinsically hypersexual, therefore, needing methods of control and regulation. These religious cultural responses "…are designed to control women and are based on unequal gender power relationships" (Bruce, 2003:44). The sexuality of black female bodies is seen as “dirty and potentially dangerous if not properly harnessed and contained within the socially defined moral boundaries of patrilineally linked society” (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001:541 in Bruce, 2003:53). It is interesting to note that the social moral order hinges upon the regulation of women’s sexualities and bodies, “…contemporary religion focuses on purity of [female] sexual behaviour while downplaying other forms of moral and ethical impurity, such as economic exploitation” (Bruce, 2003:55).

These scientific assumptions of the black female body continue to persist in postcolonial Christianity and shape the embodied experiences of black women in and outside the Church. “The validity of the Bible [and all that came with it] as canon is not questioned in the majority of African Christian women’s settings in South Africa” (Masenya, 2003:114). When it comes to issues of black women experiencing abuse (sexual and physical), subordination, and femicide the Church is silent (Haddad, 2003). This, however, is not surprising as the Church is one of the reinforcers of patriarchal ideologies that continue to subject female bodies to objectification and dehumanization. "The [Christian] view that the headship of men is viewed as God-ordained assigns all authority and power to control to men. This includes the control of women's bodies" (Masenya, 2003:119). This view not only objectifies women to the sexual urges of men but entails

men as authoritative figures in the regulation of female bodies. How the Church and Christianity relentlessly aim to police and control black women's sexualities and bodies is a direct link to the colonial gaze and imperial science, and how the black female body was viewed as hypersexual and overstimulated, and black women as lacking sexual control. It is also important to note that the patriarchal African indigenous culture is not without fault. Colonial discourses of the black female body found fertile ground in African patriarchal cultures and were able to thrive because African indigenous cultures already held patriarchal ideas against the black female body.

My study traces 19th-century scientific racism and its implication for contemporary gender discourses of religion in South Africa, particularly how religion today, informed by imperial science, views and reacts to the black female body. To unearth the interconnections of race, science, and religion regarding the black female body, my study uses the ***feminist philosophy of science*** as a framework. By exploring the current Christian religious discourses on gender with a feminist philosophy of science lens, I hope to discover ways in which black female bodies can reconstruct themselves outside life-denying, sexuality-repressing dominant religious discourses. The feminist philosophy of science framework proves to be useful as it aids my study in tracing the present Christian religious discourses of gender as emerging from the colonial gaze that hypersexualized, fetishized, and objectified the black female body, and the racist imperial 19th-century science that created 'evidence' as justification for the claimed hypersexual and inferior nature of black bodies. The feminist philosophy of science as a framework further aid in aligning my research to the oppositional and feminist epistemologies that allow women the space and language to become subjects of their own lives, outside religious and cultural control and domination.

The second part of my framework looks at ***religion and the polluting body***. Black women's bodies are viewed as inherently polluted and carry the risk of polluting men and society. Black female bodies are, therefore, seen as threats to the social moral order. Delving into this second part of my framework allows my research to draw the link between imperial science and its assumption of the black female body as dirty and polluting, as well as Christian religious discourses that conceive the female body as a source of pollution and immorality, sexual and otherwise. Exploring the link between

religion and the polluting female body allows my research to connect current Christian religious discourses on gender as emanating from 19th-century imperial science and colonialism. The current Christian religious discourses on gender include the marking of women's sexualities through church uniforms i.e., married women and virgins wearing different church uniforms, menstruation and the exclusion from holy communion or prayers, and women being granted church leadership after menopause.

My research is anchored in the works of European scientists such as Carl Linnaeus, Charles Darwin, and Francis Galton, insofar as they have produced influential philosophical works about the global South and their ideas shaped how people thought about race, gender and religion in the colonial period. My study is also guided by texts on those European scholars who have worked on imperial scientists such as Linnaeus, Darwin, and Galton during the 19th century and thereafter. My research will also look at texts that focus on how the black female body has been represented by science and religion from the colonial period until our current times. I am particularly drawn to scholars such as Gabeba Baderoon, Dorothy Roberts, and Anne McClintock. These scholars view the black female body as a gendered and sexed body and how the gender and sexuality of black women were used against them for the sexual gratification of white men. These texts bring to the fore the genesis of the exploitation, objectification, and dehumanization of the black female body and the societal obsession with it.

As its methodology, my study employs Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). This methodology hones on social justice issues and transformation. I will use Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse 19th-century science and its assumptions of the black female body, current Christian religious discourses of gender, and how the former has informed and influenced the latter. Similar to the aims of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, my research hopes to challenge current Christian religious discourses that subordinate black women and repress their agency and autonomy in the name of culture and religion.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

Before the 17th century, science and religion were considered virtues, it is during the modern period that both were expressed in beliefs and practices (Harrison, 2022). Historically, theological and philosophical questions were taken as a crucial part of the doing of 'natural philosophy' or what we know as 'science', it was during the 18th and 19th centuries that the disintegration between science and theology took effect (Harrison, 2022). "Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another" (Kohn and Reddy, 2006:1). In other words, colonialism involves the process of establishing and maintaining a colony in a particular region (Hilton, 2011). Colonialism has deemed the colonized to be below the fully human colonizer, the colonized are seen as animals, purely referred to using zoological terms (Hilton, 2011). "The colonist reduces the colonized subject to an absolute evil, a savage being in need of structure and aid from the "foreign" occupants; this mentality therefore justifies the colonizer's actions" (Hilton, 2011:51). Science and religion were crucial in the justification of colonialism – forcing Christianity on the colonized because they had 'heathen' religions (Hilton, 2011:55) and the use of scientific methods such as biometrics to establish the inferiority of the black race (Jackson and Weidman, 2005). This chapter is concerned with two things; firstly, I explore the history of science, religion/theology and colonialism. Secondly, I discuss the colonial discourses of the black female body – in other words, I discuss how the colonial gaze saw the black female body and made sense of it.

1. History of Science, Colonialism and Religion/Theology

Scientia relates to intellectual formation and science as a modern discipline emerged during the nineteenth century and its forefathers claimed to be Galileo or Newton (Harrison, 2006;2022). Before the nineteenth century, science was a theological enterprise – pursued by theologians and religious scholars and constructed within a theological or religious paradigm (Harrison, 2022). Premodern science assumed moral, theological and philosophical questions as part of science or what was then known as 'natural philosophy' (Harrison, 2022:21). The nineteenth century marked "the end of natural philosophy and the invention of modern

science" (Schaffer 1986:387-420, 413. in Harrison 2006:86). The shift from natural philosophy to natural science saw moral, theological and philosophical questions or considerations set aside (Harrison, 2022). As Harrison (2022:22) asserts; "the history of the development of scientific disciplines can be illuminative of the processes that render religious and philosophical questions no longer askable". The nineteenth century saw the baton of authority pass from those pursuing a religious vocation to the new breed of scientists (Harrison, 2006). The 19th century introduced a shift, science came to have the upper hand over religion, this meant that Christian theology had to adapt "to whatever scientific theories were currently accepted by the scientific community" (Lightman, 2022:41), including scientific assumptions and conceptions.

T. H. Huxley's provoking 1876 paper entitled 'The Evidence of the Miracle of the Resurrection' argues that the legitimacy of religious beliefs be tested using science, this is identified by Lightman (2022:37) as the principle which had led to the 'remarkable reversal' in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century where science came to have the upper hand over religion/theology. "Science came to be seen as the providing the model for seeking truth, and even ethicists and theologians had to bring their insights to the scientist for validation" (Lightman, 2022:37). Moreover, "the success of science in the second half of the nineteenth century, generally regarded by historians as the age of the worship of science, led to a reorganisation of all of the disciplines, including theology" (Lightman, 2022:37). Some prominent and influential Christian theologians of the nineteenth century such as Charles Kingsley, George Matheson, Aubrey Moore and Henry Drummond were not only willing to accept science as having legitimacy and valuable insights into religion but, also looked to science and scientific naturalists such as Darwin, Huxley and Lyell as guides to interpret and explain the theology of modern science (Lightman, 2022). Consequently, this gave the men of science, scientific and theological/religious authority (Lightman, 2022).

"…the historical emergence of the concept 'science', along with ideas of 'the scientific method' and 'the scientist', was central to establishing the social legitimacy and epistemic authority of the natural sciences" (Harrison, 2022:17). Although science came to be seen as the method for truth-seeking and all other disciplines, including theology, had to submit their insights and knowledge to science for validation (Harrison, 2022), some leading men such as

Samuel Wilberforce and William Ward still denied the scientific and religious authority of scientific naturalists (Lightman, 2022). William Ward maintained that natural philosophy was still in the territory of the Catholic Church, claiming to be a more reliable guide in the understanding of the religious prominence of the modern sciences (Lightman, 2022).

Since the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, the natural sciences came to be shaped as objective alternatives to religious and moral explanations of our natural and social worlds, primarily because 'the scientist' was regarded as morally or religiously neutral in the undertaking of science (Harrison, 2022). Interestingly, "…during the seventeenth century features of an existing 'experimental religion' were transferred into the new category of 'experimental natural philosophy'" (Harrison, 2022:23). In other words, Harrison (2022) hypothesizes that some aspects of natural philosophy (science from a theological/religious paradigm) survived into the modern natural sciences. From this, we can see why "religious traditions, understood as such, offer a good historical model for thinking about the modern sciences" (Harrison, 2022:32).

According to Masuzawa (2005), the history of the usage of "world religions" is obscure, it is not clear when the term "world religions" came into use or in what sense it came into use. "The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse on religion is reputedly dominated by an array of abstract speculative theories about the origin of religion and the subsequent stages of its development" (Masuzawa, 2005:12). Masuzawa (2005:12) suggests that "…it was the European interest in the future of religion – or the future beyond religion, […] – that motivated much of the nineteenth-century search for the origin of religion and, by the same token, the search for the most primitive forms of religion…". Anthropologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries assumed "religion" to contain "…some obscure logic or arcane "prelogical" system of thought presumably governing all aspects of tribal life" (Masuzawa, 2005:16). For this very reason Victorian anthropologists "eagerly collected, catalogued, compared, and attempted to systematize myths, rituals, and other noteworthy customs and habits that seemed to make a given tribal society unique and peculiar and, [..], very much like tribal societies found elsewhere" (Masuzawa, 2005:16).

The nineteenth-century sciences involving non-European worlds were anthropology and Orientalism (referring to colonial culture), these "promoted and bolstered the presumption that this thing called "religion" still held sway over all those who were unlike them:

nonEuropeans, Europeans of the pre-modern past, and among their own contemporary neighbours, the uncivilized and uneducated bucolic populace as well as the superstitious urban poor, all of whom were something of "savages within" (Masuzawa, 2005:19). In such a context then, religion i.e. Christianity was seen as a way of civilization and elevation from savagery and so called lower races and classes (Stratton, 2016). From its inception then, the discourse of religion and religions was a discourse of secularization and Othering (Masuzawa, 2005), religion was seen as a marker of difference between modern Europeans and the savage, tribal Other. "In view of this insight, it has become exigent that the discourse on religion(s) be viewed as an essential component, that is, a vital operating system within the colonial discourse of Orientalism" (Masuzawa, 2005:21). The conceptual order of world religions that dominated in European discourse right until the early nineteenth century divided the world into four categories, Christians, Jews, Mohammedans (Muslims), and the rest – referring to those termed pagans, heathens and idolaters, etc (Masuzawa, 2005). Christianity was deemed to be universalistic and the only 'true' religion, "in contrast, other non-Christians, those presumably with knowledge of the Supreme Being in some way, did possess religion, but obviously they did not have it quite right" (Masuzawa, 2005:49). The Jews and Mohammedans did not quite get the formula of 'true' religion correctly, they lacked its essence, that being the recognition and acknowledgement of Jesus of Nazareth as Christ and Saviour (Masuzawa, 2005). "The logic seems to run like this: insofar as Jews and Mohammedans know God, they have religion, they are, as it were, almost Christian, or at least would-be Christians, but at the moment remain in rebellion against religion's salvific Truth" (Masuzawa, 2005:49). The idea of Christianity as the only 'true' religion is also echoed by prominent African theologian and scholar, John Mbiti, who believes "all the religious traditions of Africa than the Christian constitute in their highest ideals a *praeparatio evangelica"* (Bediako, 2013:376 in Mbaya and Cezula, 2019:426). For Mbiti, Christianity is the ultimate religion because of its central figure, Jesus Christ, who he argues to be the standard for humankind (Fela, 2023). In our current modern context,

Importantly, "…the early modern taxonomic system does not identify *religions* as such […]; instead, it recognizes and categorizes different "nations", or in our terms, different "peoples", meaning "this system does not name Christianity *in addition* to so many alternative "religions" just like it, only different; rather, it classifies peoples according to the kinds of homage they pay, the ceremonies and customs they observe for that purpose, as well as

according to the specific objects and beings to which they perform these acts" (Masuzawa, 2005:61).

On the other hand, Harrison (2006) traces the terms "Religion" and "the Religions" as having emerged during the Enlightenment period, the former taken to mean Christianity and the latter being inferior versions of Christianity – Islam, Judaism and the infamous "Heathenism" (Harrison, 2006). In all three religions, "the faiths and ways of life of whole peoples tended to be reduced to bodies of dogma, and the chief characteristic of a religion became what it was that its adherents believed" (Harrison, 2006:92). "Religion" then "became the conceptual grid through which knowledge of exotic people [the 'Other'] was filtered into the Western imagination" (Harrison, 2006:92). "The 1870s are often regarded as the beginning of *Religionswissenschaft,* or the modern science of religion" (Masuzawa, 2005:107). The science of comparative religion is accredited to Cornelis Petrus Tiele and Friedrick Max Muller, the latter a German-born mythologist, philologist and Indologist pivotal in the scientific classification of religion as a tool of Western imperialism and colonialism (Chidester, 2014 and Masuzawa, 2005). "Max Muller insisted that a science of religion had to be based on comparison, since "all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison" (Chidester, 2014:62). For Muller, "[H]e who knows one, knows none" (Masuzawa, 2005:65), this was underscored by Muller's imperial project to promote "…a science of religion that generated global knowledge and power" (Chidester, 2014:62).

Muller's classification of religion was based on language, which for him "…was the defining human faculty, distinguishing humans from animals, a universal human capacity that could be classified into families" (Chidester, 2014:63). In his classification, Muller came to eight world religions including Christianity, Judaism and Islam, what were 'savage' religions did not form part of these world religions, although Muller believed " a study of the religions of uncivilized races would help us to reach a lower, that is, a more ancient and more primitive stratum of religious thought than we could reach in the sacred books might even provide keys for interpreting the library of the sacred books of the world" (Muller, 1892:147 in Chidester, 2014:63). The colonial classification of savage religions was aimed at distinguishing the European West from the rest of humankind, a discourse of 'Othering' (Masuzawa, 2005). The study of religions of uncivilized races was made possible by missionaries such as Wilhelm Bleek and Henry Callaway, who acted as middlemen in transforming these religions into texts (Chidester, 2014). These men "…eagerly collected, catalogued, compared, and attempted to

systematize myths, rituals, and other noteworthy customs and habits that seemed to make a given tribal society unique and peculiar…", furthermore, "the presence, or rather the supposed predominance, of religious and supernatural elements was believed to mark tribal society as decisively different from modern European society" (Masuzawa, 2005:1617).

Imperial religion can be summed up as "comparing without being compared, eating without being eaten, [and] imperial comparative religion was based on the centralized accumulation of knowledge from colonized people" (Chidester, 2014:88). The imperial project was not only aimed at accumulating knowledge from the colonized but to further annihilate and dominate, what Max Muller referred to as "classify and conquer" (Chidester, 2014:59).

Rupert Emerson (1969:3) defines colonialism as "the imposition of white rule on alien peoples inhabiting lands separated by salt water from the imperial centre", this imperial centre being the West, primarily Europe. Colonialism can be traced back to 1884 when "…the capital powers of Europe sat in Berlin and carved an entire continent [Africa] with a multiplicity of peoples, cultures, and languages into different colonies" (wa Thiong'o, 1986:4). The European division of the African continent into different colonies "…was to control the people's wealth; what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life". The control and conquest of African wealth were preceded by mental control, the most significant area of conquest which informs how the colonized viewed themselves in relation to the world (wa Thiong'o, 1986). "Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control" (wa Thiong'o, 1986:16). The mental control and blueprint of colonialism is the reducing of the colonized to an evil savage in need of salvation and civilization, which only the colonizer can provide, therefore justifying the colonizer's actions (Hilton, 2011). Through mental control the colonizer "…annihilate[s] a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves". Due to colonialism, "African countries, as colonies and even today as neo-colonies, came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages [and cultures] of Europe…" (wa Thiong'o, 1986 in Fela, 2023:21). In other words, due to colonialism how Africa and Africans (even today) construct their identity, worldview, epistemology and ontology is within a Western paradigm.

2. Colonial Discourse of the Black Female Body

> "Look at the Nigger!!... My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning on that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly…" (Fanon, 1952:113 in Farley, 1997:499).

The colonial discourse reduces the black woman to a mere bodily part, existing only to be named and labelled, categorized and taken (Abrahams, 1997). It views and makes sense of the black woman and her body through descriptions of open thighs and sexual appetites impossible to satisfy, fat Aunt Jemimas with unappealing behaviour reminiscent of jungle apes (Angelou, 1997) and mindless baboons on the unfortunate side of nature. The colonial discourse views the black woman as '…degraded, disgusting…swarthy, filthy and greasy…' (Comaroff, 1992:104 in Abrahams, 1997:45). The colonial discourse "…involves lavishly decorating the black [female] body with statistics, stories, and images of violence, narcotics, illiteracy, illegitimacy, and disease" (Farley, 1997:475). These conceptions and assumptions of the black woman and the black female body, the colonialists argued, have had a scientific basis and therefore objective and factual. The 19th century otherwise known as the Victorian period marked a growing scientific inquiry and within this period, humankind was placed along a hierarchy based on the differences in skin colour (Prince, 2024). 'Scientific racism' emerged as an ideology at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, from ideas about heredity and the supremacy of the North European races (Jackson Jr and Weidman, 2005). Prince (2024:5) reports that "…scientific racism in the 19th century was predated by centuries of race and racist ideology that laid the foundation for a formative period in the development of modern racist discourse". The job of scientific racism was to create a world where colonial beliefs of black inferiority were possible (Abrahams, 1997). To achieve its job, scientific racism employed different methods such as cranial measures to establish the black race as inferior in ability and intelligence (Jackson Jr and Weidman, 2005), "…a process of creating entitlement through othering" (Abrahams, 1997:37). Prominent scientists of the 19th century such as Francis Galton held the belief of black inferiority, "He [Galton] believed that Negroes were at least two grades below Anglo-Saxons in ability and intelligence" (Jackson Jr and Weidman, 2005:68). Within scientific racism is the idea that

civilization is produced by race and that the white race "was the only one capable of creative thinking and civilization building" (Jackson Jr and Weidman, 2005:70).

Scientific racism not only supported and justified the dehumanization of black people, but some further believed that the colonization and enslavement of black people was a philanthropic act to help civilize the African savages (Holmes, 2016).

Colonial science conceived of the black female body "…as *the* "missing link" between humans and animals, the final puzzle piece to explain whether the races of man were separate species" (Prince, 2024:8). To draw the missing link between humans and animals, the black female anatomy was subjected to scientific, medical and surgical experiments to determine how closely connected the black race and animals were (Prince, 2024). In 1888, the American geologist Alexander Winchell compared a black woman and a female gorilla, concluding "…the Negro skull was very thick "and is often used for butting, as is the custom of rams" (*The Victorian view of Blacks as Savages*, 1996:28). Nineteenth-century European science also compared South African Khoi woman, Sarah Baartman, to different species of monkeys to prove natural black inferiority (Abrahams, 1997). The focus on the black woman as an indicator of black inferiority is because "She is the agent of destruction, the creator of the pathological, black, urban, poor family from which all ills flow; a monster creating crack dealers, addicts, muggers, and rapists – men who become those things because of being immersed in *her* culture of poverty" (Russell, 1993:1241 in Roberts, 1997:18). Prince (2024:14) agrees, noting that the black female "…was positioned as the biological determinant and the literal reproduction site of Blackness, as well as the epitome of Blackness and everything wrong with it". In other words, the black woman is the essence and indicator of everything wrong with the black race because it comes from her. It is no surprise then that colonial discourses honed in on the black female more than the black male as "the black female […] comes to serve as an icon for black sexuality in general" (Gilman, 1985:212). "In the nineteenth century, the black female was widely perceived as possessing not only a "primitive" sexual appetite but also the external signs of this temperament – "primitive" genitalia" (Gilman, 1985:213). It seems to be this "primitive" sexual appetite and genitalia that leads black women to even copulate with apes (Gilman, 1985). The colonial gaze of the black body centres around the genitalia, the classification and justification of black people as inferior and subhuman is based on the colonial perception and obsession with black genitals, e.g the widespread belief amongst European scientists from the late 17th century onwards that

Khoisan men were born with a single testicle, and the black woman having an elongated clitoris and nymphae (Abrahams, 1997). The white obsession with the black woman's clitoris and nymphaea extended to her buttocks, "as the 18th century gave way to the 19th, descriptions of Khoisan women's buttocks become *de rigeur* for any white traveller in southern Africa" (Abrahams, 1997:42). To the European gaze, black genitals were not just a marker of difference but also of inferiority. It is because of this assumed inferiority that "when white settlers went to murder the Khoisan, European science offered them the conviction that the people they were killing were not human" (Abrahams, 1997:38).

"In 1810, 'scientific' racism received an enormous boost with the arrival of a real life specimen in London" (Abrahams, 1997: 43). This live specimen was none other than the nineteenth-century icon of black female sexuality, the 'Hottentot' Sarah Saartjie Baartman (Gilman, 1985). Available to the European audience, Baartman could be viewed in Piccadilly, London for the amount of two shillings (Abrahams, 1997). Born in 1789 in South Africa's Eastern Cape province and taken to Europe on the pretence of being a freakshow for European entertainment (Parkinson, 2016), Sarah became the representation of the hypersexual female black, in some cases she remains "the iconic representation of the abject, less than human, perpetually condemned and fetishized racial body" (McKittrick, 2010:117). The representation of Sarah and her body was used to position black women as sexually deviant, erotic and disfigured (Prince, 2024). "When the Victorians saw the female black [Sarah Baartman], they saw her in terms of her buttocks and saw represented by the buttocks all the anomalies of her genitalia" (Gilman, 1985:219). The focus on black female genitalia was to show how blacks were intrinsically different to the whites, thus a separate and lower race (Gilman, 1985), "as they purportedly evinced medical and scientific proof of black femininity as naturally lewd, primordial, and inferior" (McKittrick, 2010:117). Not just a figure in history, "[Baartman] figures into how future bodies are understood, she is positioned as an iconic origin narrative that provides an unbroken trajectory toward a present black and gendered diaspora; and she represents, […], a past and present "genital encounter" (McKittrick, 2010:120). In colonial South Africa, "the genital encounter was fundamental in setting the tone for the subsequent relationship between Khoisan and traveller" (Abrahams, 1997:42), between the African and the European, the colonized and the colonizer. Importantly, "From the vantage point of the present, we must understand that the genital encounter did not only enable the settlers to dispossess the Khoisan of the land and their

children", but further, "their obsession with the genital encounter enabled travelwriters to dispossess the descendants of the Khoisan of much of their history" (Abrahams, 1997:43). "…although the genital encounter began with Khoisan women, it spread during the 19th century to eventually encompass all African women, including the women of the African diaspora" (Abrahams, 1997:47). The present 'genital encounter' is manifested in how modern understandings of sex, race, and gender conceptualize black females as naturally inferior (McKittrick, 2010), crude and sources of contamination (Feinstein, 2010). Contemporary conceptualizations of black females include Jezebel, Welfare Queen, Tragic Mulatto, Sapphire, and Mammy, these labels and notions portray black women as "nothing more than the bearers of incurable immorality" (Roberts, 1997:8). These contemporary ideas are informed by colonial and "racist thinking [that] dictates that Black bodies, intellect, character, and culture are all inherently vulgar" (Roberts, 1997:8-9).

In *Notes on the State of Virginia* published in 1788, one of the founding fathers of the United States of America, Thomas Jefferson, suggests black women as hypersexual and open to countless sexual partners (Holmes, 2016). "His [Jefferson's] depiction of black women as having an unlimited and undiscriminating sexual capacity paved the way for a rape culture within the framework of American slavery, viewing African women as sexual commodities rather than as human beings with sexual agency" (Holmes, 2016:3). The colonizers perceived black female bodies as seducers, sexual commodities, and fetish objects for sexual debasement and dehumanization (Holmes, 2016). Colonial discourse "…used the Black female body as a literal and metaphorical representation of Blackness that linked biological classifications of "Black" with sociocultural classifications to propagate an image of inferiority" (Prince, 2024:17).

"A combination of the medical, colonial and scientific gaze on Black women's bodies has been evident for centuries, perhaps starting with the colonization of the Khoisan people by the Dutch in the 17th century" (Prince, 2024:11). The colonial discourses of the black female body included and resulted in pornographic photographs of Black women on postcards in the 19th and 20th centuries (Prince, 2024). "The prevailing belief [among the Dutch colonialists] was that moral failings *in any human,* like promiscuity, would physically manifest themselves in the anatomy as an *inherent/thus heritable* trait. For example, the medical defects observed in Khoisan women like Sarah Baartman, steatopygia and hypertrophied labia, were considered physical evidence of the *inherent* (from *birth*) promiscuity of *all* Black women"

(Prince, 2024:12). For the colonial gaze, the sexuality of the black woman was indicated by the size of her buttocks, the larger the buttocks, the more sexual she was believed to be…black women could not be 'seen' outside their buttocks and genitalia (Prince, 2024). The sexual organs of black female bodies and their given characteristics were generalized and deemed representational of all black women, as Prince (2024:13) asserts "to see one was to see them all".

Colonial discourses about the black female body can be starkly summarized by the following; "their "voluptuousness" is "developed to a degree of lascivity unknown in our climate, for their sexual organs are much more developed than those of whites" (Gilman, 1985:212-213) and the "…claims that Black women ovulate more often and mature sexually faster than white women…" (Roberts, 1997:12). Although there is consciousness in current research about the link between colonialism and current dynamics of race, sex and gender in former colonies such as South Africa, there is a gap in directly linking 19th-century science, how it has informed what we currently understand and accept as religion, and the deliberate unearthing of the effects of 19th-century scientific assumptions of the black female body had on our current Christian religious discourses on gender, specifically on black women and black womanhood. This study aims to bridge that gap.

The following chapter concerns the study's methodology and theoretical frameworks. The aim of the chapter is to showcase the method and theory underpinning the study, and how the study applies this to achieve its objectives.

CHAPTER THREE METHOD AND THEORY

The study employs the feminist philosophy of science as the first part of its framework, the interconnection of religion and the polluting body is the second part of the framework. Employing the feminist philosophy of science as its framework will enable the research to articulate the racist and sexist ideologies entrenched in 19th-century science, and also the subordinate position that the Black female body has in current Christian religious discourses. Exploring the link between religion and the polluting body will allow the study to illuminate the current Christian religious discourses of gender, delving into how religion views and reacts to the Black female body as influenced and informed by 19th-century scientific assumptions of the Black female body as hypersexual, polluted, and unruly. The chapter first provides a comprehensive overview of the feminist philosophy of science, secondly, it details the relevance of the feminist philosophy of science as a suitable framework for the study, and the chapter then explores the second part of its framework; the interconnection of religion and the notion of the polluting Black female body. To briefly follow is the chapter's conclusion.

1. An Overview of Feminist Philosophy of Science

Feminist philosophy of science developed in the 1960s within the studies of feminist science, "the field is institutionally and intellectually rooted in academic feminism" (Richardson, 2010:338). Feminist philosophy of science emerged in the context of "building oppositional epistemologies to ground feminist scholarship in the social sciences and humanities, and offering critiques and reconstructions of the (natural and social) sciences" (Richardson, 2010:339). The feminist philosophy of science standpoint is of a socio-political epistemology, "characterized by the thesis that those who are marginalized or oppressed under conditions of systemic inequality may, in fact, be better knowers, in a number of respects, than those who are socially or economically privileged" (Wylie, 2012:47). It further recognizes that the oppressed have an epistemic advantage arising from their experiences and the understanding thereof, and gender is one of the dimensions that makes an epistemic difference (Wylie, 2012). Feminist philosophy of science not only critically challenges gender-conventional assumptions on modern subjects in our familiar contexts but goes even further to challenge historical and culturally distant gender-conventional assumptions (Wylie, 2012). The aim of

the feminist philosophy of science is "to critique and correct sexist science, and to critically evaluate our models of scientific reason and practice in light of the findings of gender studies of science" (Richardson, 2010:337). Impressively, through the use of case studies, the feminist philosophy of science has advanced research beyond the philosophy of science, leading to fruitful investigations in other disciplines (Richardson, 2010). As a framework, the feminist philosophy of science prioritizes the perspectives and voices of women with the "…intent on reclaiming women's words and cultural worlds focusing on the private, domestic dimensions of well-studied cultural contexts that had been eclipsed by a preoccupation with the public roles and activities of men that were taken to stand for the cultural whole" (Wylie, 2012:52). In the 1970s, science was an institution that was implicated and entrenched in supplying ideologically motivated support to sexist theories (Richardson, 2010), furthermore, science was and still is entangled with racist theories and racism (Jackson

Jr and Weidman, 2005). Importantly, the feminist philosophy of science forges "…scholarship that explicitly reflects upon the ethics and conditions of academic knowledge production, is grounded in the experiences and knowledge of subordinated peoples, and advances research and values associated with emancipatory politics" (Richardson, 2010:346).

Feminist philosophy of science's "reflection on gender and science presents *kinds of questions* that may be used as a tool for probing historical, philosophical, and social dimensions of science", furthermore, "studies of gender in scientific knowledge raise original, integrative, and challenging questions about science, questions that are not applicable simply to gender, but prove useful for analyzing science in general" (Richardson, 2010:348). I will employ the feminist philosophy of science as my framework because of its ability to recognize issues of gender in the sciences and that it goes beyond just gender and into other important terrains. My study enquires about the epistemic and theological effects 19th-century scientific assumptions of the Black female body had on Christian religious discourses on gender. The terrains that my study focuses on are gender, science, and religion. Employing feminist philosophy of science will enable the study to illuminate the Black female as a gendered body, how 19th-century science has commodified, dehumanized, hypersexualized, and exploited this gendered body and how the colonial classifications of race and black(ness) have played a significant role in this. Furthermore, the framework will aid the study in interpreting the racist, colonial assumptions and conceptions science has had

on the black female body and trace the current Christian religious discourses of gender as emerging from this racist and colonial enterprise.

The study is an exploration of how Victorian scientific assumptions and conceptions of the Black female body as hypersexual, deviant, and animalistic (Gilman, 1985), have influenced or informed current religious discourses on gender in South Africa. I seek to uncover how these scientific assumptions have been applied to the Black female body in South Africa, with the interest of making visible how science has constructed or shaped our ideas around religion today and our conceptions of gender. Employing the feminist philosophy of science as a framework will demonstrate how current Christian religious discourses of gender are colonial reproductions that deem Black female bodies as sites of 'incurable immorality', uncontrollable reproductivity, and sexual promiscuity (Roberts, 1997:8) and therefore needing control through sexually repressive ideologies of modesty, purity and abstinence.

My research explicitly prioritizes the lived and embodied experiences of Black women, placed at the very bottom of the conceptual hierarchy black women continue to be subjected to oppression and marginalization. Against the vicious experiences that black women are subjected to, my research uses the feminist philosophy of science framework as a tool for reframing the black female body to self-agency and autonomy. The feminist philosophy of science is further suitable for my research as it seeks "…to understand the epistemic effects of systematic social differentiation, including both the effects of situated knowledge and the conditions that foster transformative criticism" (Wylie, 2012:67). My key research aim is to uncover the epistemic and religious/theological effects that 19th-century science had on Christian religious discourses on gender, additionally, as mentioned that I am interested to reframe the black female body outside 19th century scientific and religious assumptions in hopes of black women taking control and owning their bodies and sexualities outside religious and cultural constraints of obsession and regulation.

"Feminist scholarship has demonstrated that sex and gender constitute primary categories in human social life and that gender attributions are deeply embedded in human knowledge, language, and symbolic culture" (Richardson, 2010:348). Through the use of the feminist philosophy of science as a conceptual framework, I would like to reiterate, that my research aims not merely to illuminate the coloniality embedded in current Christian religious

discourses on gender in South Africa, but to further contribute to the development and advancement of liberatory discourses on gender – whether religious or secular.

2. Engaging Religion and Ritual/ Moral Pollution

When the Zimbabwean police in 2013 initiated a campaign aimed at expelling women sex workers from Harare, Christian churches in the country rallied behind the Zimbabwean police to supposedly get rid of this immorality (Settler and Engh, 2015). In the same year, during Swaziland's national elections, women were threatened to be banned from casting their votes if they wore miniskirts and trousers (Settler and Engh, 2015). Indeed, "…at the heart of these religious and cultural objections are not only concerns with sexuality, but also the reinforcement of the idea that Black women's bodies are the locus of physical disease and moral decay" (Settler and Engh, 2015:130-131). The black female body seen as the vessel of immorality and pollution has immensely shaped the Christian attitude toward women's bodies for example, menstruation (exclusion from communion and prayers) and only offered leadership after menopause, pregnancy out of wedlock (exclusion from the church while pregnant) and women required to wear different uniforms depending on whether they are virgins, wives, or widows, and women required to cover their heads. The current Christian attitudes on women and menstruation seem to have emerged from the Hebrew Bible which contains texts on women being impure during their menstrual cycles (Feder, 2022). The religious anxieties about women's menstruation and pollution are because "…the state of being impure usually involves the power to make something else impure" (Feder, 2022:30), furthermore, impurity is taken to be a symbol of death (Feder, 2022). Just as "in the colonial context the unclothe heathen body posed an acute threat to the fragile colonial world and had to be disciplined in the name of decency, cleanliness and health," so does the current Christian religious context see the Black female body as a threat to its religious and moral standing. The religious objections and attempts to regulate the Black female body are due to the impossibility of imagining it outside sexual arousal (Bakane-Yusuf, 2011 in Settler and Engh, 2015). "Thus in order for society to be safeguarded from moral decay, likeminded moralists throughout sub-Saharan Africa would argue that women's bodies must be regulated by men, a practice largely underscored by religious and social discourses that relies on rhetoric of civic morality and public health" (Settler and Engh, 2015:131).

“To pollute something is to contaminate it; to abominate, abhor, or revile something is to feel a sense of loathing toward it and to treat it in accordance with that feeling – to reject and shun it” (Feinstein, 2014:20-21). According to Eve Feinstein (2010:122), "to qualify as dirt, or pollution, an entity must have the power to communicate its "dirtiness" to that which is clean", furthermore, "pollution belongs to the lower part of the conceptual hierarchy" and "its unwantedness, and hence its contaminating power, derives from the emotion of aversion or disgust". In the case of the Black female body, pollution and "dirtiness" are qualified by its mere existence, solely existing Black women are represented and associated with disease, pollution, and degradation (Settler and Engh, 2015). “The fetishization of the Black body as site of disease is best understood in the context of the long history of the science of empire" (Settler and Engh, 2015:141). As McClintock (1995:212) notes in imperial and colonial science, "soap took shape as a technology of social purification, inextricably entwined with the semiotics of imperial racism and class denigration.” Colonial and postcolonial, Black women are considered to be at the very bottom of the conceptual hierarchy, which explains American geologist, Alexander Winchell, making a comparison between a Black woman and a female gorilla, and French naturalist, Buffon, claiming Black women copulate with apes (Gilman, 1985). The aversion and disgust that 19th-century science and Victorian society had on Blackness and the Black female body in particular, is the same aversion and disgust behind religious objections aimed at regulating Black women’s bodies and sexualities. Feinstein (2010:123) further defines pollution as "dirt that threatens to get into the body, where such entry is unwanted". Pollution is in opposition to purity, Feder (2022:27) defines purity as “the more congenial and marketable counterpart of “pollution””. How the Black female body is viewed and conceptualized by religion indicates not just the (black) female body as a container of pollution that threatens the religious moral order (Feinstein, 2010). It also erroneously suggests that pollution is intrinsic to the Black female body, deeply engineered and wired. That culture cannot undo it as it is determined by nature but, as Miller asserts, “it is culture, not nature, that draws the lines between defilement and purity, clean and filthy, those crucial boundaries disgust is called on to police” (Miller, 1997:15-16 in Feinstein, 2010:123).

To further illuminate the entanglement of religion and the polluting female body is the fact that 'sexual pollution' is particularly attributed to women whose sexual choices and behaviours deviate from the religious sexual norms (Feinstein, 2014). "Sexual pollution is,

accordingly, generally understood by biblical authors as a condition that affects females alone" (Feinstein, 2010:115), additionally, sexual pollution "is a product of a particular understanding of the female body and its potential for contamination" (Feinstein, 2010:125). Because women are viewed as sources of pollution, women are understood as indefinite risks of contaminating men, culture, tradition, religion, etc. The concept of sacredness or holiness is fundamental to religion, “pollution has a specific relationship with the sacred. That which is pure befits the divine realm, while that which is polluted is unfit for contact with the sacred” (Feinstein, 2014:19). In the Christian religious context, women are seen in opposition to holiness and this has informed the religious attitudes toward women, as previously mentioned, women facing exclusion from partaking in holy communion during their menstrual cycles, women only offered Church leadership well after menopause, women getting punished and excluded from the Church if and when they fall pregnant outside of wedlock, and women's choices of clothing determined by the Church (Settler and Engh, 2015).

According to Douglas (1966:12), “a polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone.’ Furthermore, “pollution can be committed intentionally, but intention is irrelevant to its effect – it is more likely to happen inadvertently” (Douglas, 1966:120. As we have established in the Christian religious context, women are intertwined with the notion of pollution, women are thought of as sources of pollution and carry the risk of polluting others. The regulation of Black women and their bodies by Christian religious ideals departs from the belief that “a polluting person is always in the wrong” (Douglas, 1966:12), women are viewed to be inherently immoral and intertwined with immorality that they cannot help themselves but do wrong. The redeeming feature then becomes the Church and its moral rules and regulations that women ought to follow to not threaten the stability of the established moral order. The intention is to keep, as Feder (2022:239) asserts, “…the threat of female sexuality at a safe distance”. “The expressions of pollution in purity praxis is inextricably related to gender attitudes, many of these essentialist, and the [subordinate] position of women in […] society” (Feder, 2022:262).

“Anthony Pinn (2010) writing from the perspective of black theology in the USA, asserts that historically American protestant religion reinforced the idea that black people’s bodies need to be policed and kept under surveillance because if not arrested in labour, they would

degenerate into chaos" (Settler and Engh, 2015:128). Exploring the connectedness of religion and the polluting Black body will allow my research to illuminate this very idea. In the South African Christian religious context, the Black female body is arrested by Christian religious ideas, in the lack of bodily expression, sexual freedom, and individual autonomy. As I will argue in detail in the next chapter, the policing of the Black female body and its sexuality is underscored by colonial views of the Black body as degenerate. These life-denying and repressive ideas are still maintained in the postcolonial Church and continue to determine the everyday life experiences of many Black women in South Africa.

3. Methodological Orientations

This study is a desktop study, it employs the use of books, archives, academic journals, documents, and other textual sources found on the World Wide Web. The study will read those historical, philosophical, and scientific traditions that have influenced thinking in South Africa, namely British, German and Dutch, produced between the 17th and 19th centuries. I will anchor my research in three European scientists; Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and Francis Galton (1822-1911). These influential men have written philosophically about the global South and their thinking has influenced how people have thought about gender and religion in the colonial era. I will be drawing conclusions from this philosophy of science about South Africa and what it means for us today. Methodologically, my study is guided by solely focusing on texts by Linnaeus, Darwin and Galton, as well as those European scholars who have worked around them. This parameter is to avoid the ethical challenge of reading and extracting any literature and texts for convenience.

I have settled upon textual sources for the collection of data because the study seeks to unearth the epistemic and theological effects of 19th-century science archives on current gender and religious discourses in South Africa, empirical methodology will be less advantageous to the study's aims. The study adopts feminist critical discourse analysis as a methodological approach in its exploration, examination and analysis of Victorian-era science and religious discourse.

I will read a series of texts concerned with the framing and representation of the black female body by science, and religion scholars from the colonial period, and also a selection of books and scholars that seek to critique this history of fetishization and representation such as

Regarding Muslims by Gabeba Baderoon (2014), *Killing the Black Body* by Dorothy Roberts (1997) and *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* by Anne Mcclintock (1997). I will ground my study in books such as *The Invention of World Religions* by Tomoko Masuzawa (2005), and *Empire of Religion* by David Chidester (2014) to explore how the classification of science was applied to religion and how the latter was used as a colonial invention and imperial project.

A Brief Overview of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

To read the historical texts concerned with the framing and representation of the black female body, I will use Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as my method of reading these archival texts. Feminist critical discourse analysis "is a perspective that seeks to examine the complex, subtler, and sometimes not so subtle ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and power asymmetries get discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and contested in specific communities and discourse contexts" (Lazar, 2014:182). The focus of feminist critical discourse analysis is on issues of social justice and transformation, "the aim is to challenge discourses that entrench gendered social arrangements that work toward a closure of possibilities for women and men as human persons" (Lazar, 2014:182). As a critical perspective, feminist critical discourse analysis emerged between the intersections of feminist studies and critical discourse analysis (CDA), "unlike feminist approaches that work with descriptive discourse analytic methods, feminist critical discourse analysis has the advantage of operating, at the outset, within a politically invested, socially explanatory program of discourse analysis" (Lazar, 2014:182). Importantly, "a central concern for FCDA is a critical analysis of discourses which sustain a gender social order in which some people, by virtue of being men, are accorded privileges systematically, and others, by virtue of being "women" are routinely disadvantaged, excluded, and not taken seriously" (Lazar, 2014:184). The FCDA agenda is one of radical emancipation against patriarchal, racist, sexist, and discriminatory modes of thought (Lazar, 2014). It is important to note that "'Doing' FCDA is clearly not just an academic exercise in deconstruction of texts and talk for its own sake. It starts from a position of knowing that the issues dealt with have material consequences for groups of women and men in specific communities and contexts, and is driven by a conviction in effecting social change" (Lazar, 2014:185).

I will use feminist critical discourse analysis by critically examining and analyzing a) 19thcentury scientific assumptions of the black female body, and b) current Christian religious discourses of the black female body. I will then explicitly trace current Christian religious discourses of the black female body as rooted in 19th-century scientific assumptions of the black female body. The feminist critical discourse analysis is useful and relevant to my research because firstly; it focuses on issues of social justice and transformation (Lazar, 2014) and "is openly committed to the achievement of a just social order through a critique of discourse" (Lazar, 2007:145). My research is centered on these critical feminist aims. Furthermore, feminist critical discourse analysis advances the "…rich and nuanced analyses of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining hierarchically gendered social orders" (Lazar, 2007:141). FCDA goes beyond academic activity and has practical aims, its deconstruction and challenging of texts is motivated by the recognition that texts have material consequences for women in their different contexts, and therefore, aims for social change in the lives of the marginalized and discriminated against. "The goal is toward constantly imagining and opening up ways of "doing" and "becoming" that are more socially inclusive and respectful of all persons" (Lazar, 2014:184). Similar to FCDA, the research hopes "…to challenge [religious] discourses that entrench gendered social arrangements that work toward a closure of possibilities for women […] as human persons" (Lazar, 2014:182), making FCDA a suitable method for the reading of these historical texts especially. As a methodology, FCDA is informed by a "feminist political imagination" (Lazar, 2014:182), "in the feminist political imagination, "gender" becomes a radical issue and relies on feminist theory to continue its radical critique of dominant discourses on gender" (Lazar, 2014:183). This is what my research aims to do; in focusing on the gendered Black female body, I rely on feminist theory to critique the Christian religious discourses on gender as emanating from a racist and colonial science. Aligned with feminist critical discourse analysis, my critique of Christian religious discourses on gender is not just an academic exercise.

Just as FCDA, my study recognizes that the current Christian religious discourses on Black female bodies have real consequences for Black women and significantly shape their embodied and lived experiences. Similar to FCDA, my study of gender is a political choice emanating from a political aim for social change. My "feminist political imagination" (Lazar, 2014:182) that motivates this research is Black female bodies existing freely in their

autonomy and self-regulation. I imagine the Black female body unchained by religious and moral codes that view it as inherently vulgar, oversexed, polluted, and unruly.

Through the use of feminist critical discourse analysis as a methodology, my research aims to argue that current Christian religious discourses are not only gendered but perpetuate and reinforce oppressive social structures against female bodies. The focus on gender is important because "gender is a social relation that enters into and partially constitutes all other social relations and activities. Based on the specific, asymmetric meanings of male and female, and the consequences assigned to one or the other within concrete social practices, such an allocation becomes a constraint on further practices" (Lazar, 2007:145). The control of black women's bodily autonomy by Christian religious discourses in the name of maintaining the social moral order has a significant influence on other aspects of black women's lives. The susceptibility of Black female bodies to gender-based violence, sexual and physical violence, domestic abuse, and so forth are shaped and informed by Christian religious attitudes to the black female body as naturally unruly and needing external regulation. FCDA is a suitable methodology as my research shares its feminist aims with it.

This chapter sought to introduce and discuss its framework and methodology. I first provided a comprehensive overview of the feminist philosophy of science, detailing the relevance of the feminist philosophy of science as a suitable and relevant framework for my research. I then explored the second part of my framework; the interconnections of religion and the idea of the polluting Black female body. By exploring the link between religion and the polluting body, I aimed to show how current Christian religious discourses of gender are of the view that Black female bodies are sources of disease and pollution. I then introduced the feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) as my methodology of reading those historical, philosophical, and scientific traditions that have influenced thinking in South Africa, namely British, German, and Dutch, produced between the 17th and 19th centuries. In this chapter, I stated the works of Carl Linnaeus, Charles Darwin, and Francis Galton, as well as those European scholars who have worked around them as my primary focus of texts, this was to avoid the ethical challenge of reading any literature for convenience. I then gave an overview of feminist critical discourse analysis and discussed its relevance to my study, and how it will aid my study with its aims.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

I hypothesise that the current Christian religious discourses of gender and attitudes toward black female bodies, namely the exclusion of menstruating women from partaking in holy communion and prayers, the exclusion and suspension of pregnant unmarried women from the Church until well after giving birth, women being required to wear different Church uniforms depending on whether they are virgins, wives, or widows, has to do with faith traditions or denominational preferences, but also is a product of how the colonial gaze saw the black female body and how imperial science conceptualized the black female body as (1) source of pollution and contamination, (2) oversexed/hypersexual, and (3) unruly, deviant and a threat to the social/ moral order. I believe that through the Christian colonization of South Africa, these imperial scientific assumptions of the black female body influenced and shaped what is happening in the Church today, i.e. its requirements and regulation of the black female body through things such as exclusion from Holy Communion when menstruating. In this chapter, I first discuss and give examples of how the Church today responds to the black female body and its attempts to regulate it. I then explore three ways in which I see imperial science being applied in reaction to the black female body, these three ways are as mentioned, the black female body as a source of pollution, oversexed, and unruly. To follow this discussion is the chapter's conclusion.

1. The Church and its response to the Black female body today

Many Churches in South Africa are accomplices in the patriarchal subordination of female bodies. Speaking of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Africa, Chisale and Moyo (2016:90) have observed that, “virginity is highly valued as a sign of purity. However it is always the virginity of the girl child that is put to test both through Church practices and traditional cultural practices”. Christian Churches and their attitudes toward virginity are disproportionately focused on young girls and women, "the Church has a history of shaping adolescent girls' sexuality by insisting on abstinence until marriage" (Chisale and Moyo, 2016:90). Reporting on their research that sought to explore the role of Church discipline in regulating and informing adolescent girls’ sexuality in the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in

Africa, Chisale and Moyo (2016:90-91) note, “in 17 of the church services that we visited in the process of our data collection during absolution for public sin only girls were absolved”. Furthermore, “the church’s disciplinary machinery seemed not to care about the invisibility of the boys and men who […] [impregnate] the girls” (Chisale and Moyo, 2016:91). The invisibility of the male sex and the Church’s lack of concern is because male sexuality is not viewed as a threat to the moral social order. Not different to cultural and traditional practices that test young women for virginity, the Church practices virginity testing through its onesided teachings and emphasis on sexual abstinence and sexual purity directed at young women (Chisale and Moyo, 2016). "'Consequently adolescent girls live and practice their faith through protecting their virginities" (Chisale and Moyo, 2016:95). Interestingly, faith, virginity and sexual abstinence are so intimately connected and serve as a declaration of faith and religiosity, more so in the lives of women than men. When young women fall short of this declaration of faith through preserving virginity and fall pregnant outside marriage, the stigma, shame, and Church discipline are unsurprisingly directed at them alone, the men who pregnant them excluded (Chisale and Moyo, 2016). Pregnancy outside wedlock means that women are not allowed to partake in things deemed holy in the Church, in fact, Chisale and Moyo (2016:96) “…discovered that the pregnant girl is suspended from active ministry and participation in the Eucharist for the duration of the church discipline which is usually equivalent to the duration of the pregnancy. According to the tradition a person under church discipline is expected to stop playing any leadership role and partaking in the Holy Communion”. More shocking is that “participant observation also confirm that there are some Lutheran churches that still make or force the pregnant girl to sit in the last bench or ‘sinners’ bench of the congregation until absolution” (Chisale and Moyo, 2016:96). In the religious context, the sexuality of black women is not only subordinate to that of men, but the Church further owns and controls it by enforced rules and regulations of when, where, and how black women can have sex (Chisale and Moyo, 2016).

Reporting on sex, stigma, and single mothers in the Evangelical Christian communities in the USA and South Africa, Feuerbacher (2019) observes that single mothers in evangelical circles are vilified and positioned as worthy of social struggles. "This metanarrative concerns the appropriate context for practising one's sexuality and teaches that pre-marital sex is a sin, a mistake with dire consequences, an active rebellion against God" (Feuerbacher, 2019:64).

Similar to the Lutheran Church's attitudes toward unmarried young pregnant women as sinners (Chisale and Moyo, 2016), the Evangelical Christian communities share the same view. For these Evangelical Christian communities, "single mothers are themselves marked by sin – through not making a marriage with their children's biological fathers occur or last, and through taking on the authoritative roles of head of household and breadwinner" (Feuerbacher, 2019:58). Just as the Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Christian communities administer church discipline to unmarried mothers before they can re-enter church fellowship, in addition a demonstration of having repented from sin is required (Feuerbacher, 2019). In such a context, "abstinence is said to be the godly choice, the practice that aligns with God's will and that which shows our submission to a divine plan that we may not understand or even desire" (Feuerbacher, 2019:69).

The Shembe Church, known as *Ibandla lamaNazaretha* also positions the black female body as responsible for safeguarding the ethics and well-being of communities, therefore 'purity' and virginity are strongly encouraged (West, 2007). "In Shembe's construction of community, 'ritual practice and power center on the female body', for '[t]he sacrifice of sexual desire by the young female virgins enables the retention of ritual purity and augments the cosmological power that surrounds the religious group as a whole'" (West, 2007:497). The trend can also be seen in Pentecostal Churches across Southern Africa, an example of this is the Deliverance Church in Kenya which preaches aggressively about sexual morality and abstinence among its young people, the mantra is "Keep holy distance and abstain till He comes" (Parsitau, 2009:1). Ranging from the Lutheran Church, Anglican Church, the Shembe Church, and Pentecostal Churches, the response to the black female body lies in the attempt to police it…putting so-called moral and ethical constraints to manage the risk of pollution thought to be inherent in black bodies.

Aligned with its discourses of female sexual purity and abstinence pre-marriage, postmarriage the Church conceptualizes and views the black female body as a reproductive machine. The church "…view[s] motherhood as important 'work for God', 'an altar of sacrifice', and liken it to Mary's role in the birth of Jesus Christ", furthermore, "…at this altar women offer their bodies (their wombs) for God's work as 'God's laboratory', out of which 'miracles are produced'" (Mate, 2002:559). Not only is it seen as God's will for women to be mothers, but the use of contraception is said to break the 'altar of motherhood' (Mate, 2002:560). In such a context then, it is no surprise that infertility is likened to the devil's

craftiness and abortion is not a choice (Mate, 2002). “Pregnancy is seen as a special gift: one cannot plan for it nor choose which to keep and which to abort. Discourses of choice and the need for women to control their bodies are therefore nullified and rendered sinful” (Mate, 2002:561). Additionally, infertility is seen as faulty and connotes degradation (Mate, 2002).

This religious (and cultural) objectification and subordination of the black female body is one of the factors behind the epidemic of gender-based violence in South Africa. “Religion plays a role in the continuation of GBV through traditional teachings about women in the Bible, leaving them feeling like they are subordinate to men” (Landman, 2022 in Ndlovu et al., 2024:3). “Thus, it is important to examine […] spirituality and its views on the subordination of women which causes them to unconsciously ritualise their bodies and sexualities” (Ndlovu et al., 2024:4).

The narratives the church has regarding women’s bodies and subordination to men, and gender-based violence are interconnected (Ndlovu et al., 2024). The female body and personhood are deemed to belong to everybody but the woman herself, it belongs to her husband for his sexual pleasure and satisfaction and to God as a laboratory for creation and reproduction (Mate, 2002). Religious and cultural narratives told to married women in the church include, “‘do not say “no” to sex, [when a husband wants it] because married life revolves around it. Sex in marriage is God-ordained” (Mate, 2002:557). As God’s laboratories for reproduction, it is maintained that pregnancy is a ‘visitation from God’, furthermore, “…pregnancy elevates women to being ‘co-workers’ with God in the production of humanity – ‘an elevation’ from ‘a state of abjection’ because of traditional custom” (Mate, 2002:559). Indeed, these religious and cultural attitudes to women’s bodies play a crucial role in the continuation of gender-based violence (Ndlovu et al., 2024).

2. The Black female body as Polluting

The black female body viewed as a source of pollution is a phenomenon that I continually observe and encounter in my own religious life. In the Old Apostolic Church (OAC), *all* women – young and old, married and unmarried, are not allowed to stand at the altar or preach. Their understanding is of course, that the altar is sacred and pure. The reason that only men are allowed to occupy such a space is because of the unsaid assumption that women are sources of contamination, dirt, and impurity, therefore threats to the sanctity and purity of

the altar. In the AOC as in other churches that do not afford women leadership roles, “women take it as a norm that […] they are not expected to participate in the holy things of the church” (Chisale and Moyo, 2016:96). The religious response to pregnancy outside of wedlock stems from this unspoken assumption of pollution and contamination. This assumption within the church is so pervasive that as Chisale and Moyo (2016:96) report their findings, “participant observation […] confirm that there are some Lutheran churches that still make or force the pregnant girl to sit in the last bench or ‘sinners’ bench of the congregation until absolution”. Not only is this act of separation of pregnant girls from the rest of the congregation humiliating, but it is done because the pregnant unmarried body represents sin, and this sin has the potential of polluting the ‘holiness’ of the congregation. This explains why pregnant unmarried women are not even allowed to partake in Holy Communion and are further expected to step down from any leadership position they might have possessed (Chisale and Moyo, 2016). The humiliation, shame, and dehumanization the church subjects the unmarried pregnant girls and women through rules and regulations of separation from the rest of the congregation are further inherited by their children. As reported, "In one Lutheran church it was shocking to learn that pastors do not baptize or touch children born out of wedlock. In their view, these children cannot be members of the body of Christ because they are conceived in sin, implying that they are sin in themselves" (Chisale and Moyo, 2016:97). However, I do not think that this is an isolated incident. Still, it is how churches often view children conceived outside the Christian ideal – marriage.

Current Christian religious discourses view the already polluting female body as even more impure and contaminated during menstruation. In Judaeo-Christian tradition, “a woman, during her regular monthly period, is unclean for seven days and everything including everyone that comes in contact with her is unclean until evening (sunset)”, furthermore, “a woman had to purify herself after she finished menstruating, until then anything she touched would be unclean” (Olusola and Ojo, 2014:121). These Judaeo-Christian perspectives on the female body and menstruation continue to persist in Christianity today. African Instituted Churches (and other forms of Christianity in Africa) attitudes to female menstruation are a reflection of this. For example, the Celestial Church of Christ in Nigeria does not allow menstruating women to enter the church for fear of pollution and contamination, it is only "after eight days [that] she shall go to the Church for sanctification in the prescribed manner before entering the Church” (Olusola and Ojo, 2014:125). Interestingly, in the Cherubim and

Seraphim churches (also in Nigeria), it is believed that because of the presence of menstruating women in the church, prayers will not be answered nor will prophesying achieve the desired results (Olusola and Ojo, 2014). “Also, menstruation period proved particularly disastrous to women wishing to hold ecclesiastical office” (Olusola and Ojo, 2014:125). It is not only menstruating women who are deemed as sources of pollution and contamination, but also women who have given birth who first have to be cleansed by the priest with holy water before being allowed into the church (Olusola and Ojo, 2014). These religious attitudes to the female body and menstruation are not confined to Nigeria but are evident in South African churches as well. In the Shembe Church, menstrual blood is also seen as polluting, “menstruating women are not allowed to shake hands with church officials and priests; neither can such women touch their clothing or food. This would diminish the healing power of leaders according to their beliefs” (Browne, 2005:99).

The black female body is also seen as polluting and in need of cleansing in issues of death and mourning. In a Pentecostal church in Bolobedu South in Limpopo, while mourning the wife of the deceased is required to cover her head and, post-burial her genitals are pierced using a sharpened cane peel and she has to jump over a boiling clay pot that contains herbs (Mzondi and Modiba, 2024). After that, "members of the bereaved family gather to participate in a cleansing ritual led by an indigenous healer" (Mzondi and Modiba, 2024:4). Furthermore, “in preparation for the conclusion of the widowhood mourning period, the widow participates in various activities, including purchasing a traditional doek and t-shirts for the matriarch” (Mzondi and Modiba, 2024:5). After the mourning period has ended and the cleansing ritual performed, the widow is appointed a replacement husband.

This view of the black female body as polluted is also evident in how widows, in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa (EPCSA) are separated from the rest of the congregants during church services/evening prayers meant to console and comfort family during death (Khosa-Nkantini et al., 2020). “They [widows] are usually in the bedroom, sitting on the mattress covered in blankets as part of the mourning rites. This means that they are not part of the evening services and sermons that are meant to comfort the family of the deceased’ (Khosa-Nkantini et al., 2020:3). Also, “throughout the mourning period there were items that were only used by the widows and could not be used by anyone else, and these are discarded afterwards” (Khosa-Nkantini et al., 2020:6). These cultural and religious attitudes to the black female body are informed by assumptions of pollution and uncleanliness.

The 19th-century imperial science and colonialism assumed and conceived of the black female body as pathological, inherently different, degenerative, and a source of pollution (Gilman, 1985). The 19th-century scientific assumption of the black female body as polluting lies in its claimed 'primitive' and animallike sexuality, which encapsulates the whole essence of the black body (Gilman, 1985). Prominent 19th-century scientist Charles Darwin also saw the black female physiology as intrinsically deviant, he viewed "…the buttocks of the Hottentot [referring to a black female] as a somewhat comic sign of the primitive, grotesque nature of the black female" (Princeton, 1981:317 in Gilman, 1985:219). The postcolonial Christian attitudes toward pollution and uncleanliness of the black female body are a continuation of the 19th-century imperial science and colonial gaze of black bodies. The 19thcentury imperial and civilizing mission was "washing and clothing the savage" (McClintock, 1995:208), which was embodied in a single commodity – soap. The current Christian mission is to regulate and manage the perceived inherent pollution of black female savages with the aim of moral and religious salvation. In
Victorian society, "Soap was credited not only with bringing moral and economic salvation to Britain's "great unwashed" but also with magically embodying the spiritual ingredient of the imperial mission itself", furthermore, "soap offered the promise of spiritual salvation and regeneration through commodity consumption, a regime of domestic hygiene that could restore the threatened potency of the imperial body politic and the race" (McClintock, 1995:211). The current Christian obsession with the so-called 'moral' control of black female bodies within and outside the Church is an inheritance of Victorian discourses of cleanliness and racial purification. This religious obsession seems to have the aim of confronting and undoing the savagery and infancy blackness is perceived to represent, and this is focused on the black female body in particular because it represents the black race as a whole (Gilman, 1985). What is inherently diabolical with the black female body is indicative of that which is inherently diabolical with the black race. I think this is why the Church has such an unbalanced gender focus on issues of morality and sexuality, to achieve control of the black female body and make it 'clean' and civilized, is an achievement of cleansing and civilizing black people. The project of "being washed in the blood of the lamb" (McClintock, 1995:208) is an ongoing spectacle in black Christianity – laced with scientific racism, colonialism, and imperialism.

The idea of the polluting black female body and the postcolonial Christian religious reactions to it, such as putting it in isolation because of its evident hypersexuality, subjecting it to socalled ritual cleansing ceremonies, menstruation and exclusion from all that is considered sacred and pure, is not just a colonial and imperial science enterprise but is an ambition of racial cleansing, a counteraction to the dangerous and 'immoral' blackness and pursuit of a purification worth approval from white religious and cultural superiority. As McClintock (1995:212) asserts in colonial and imperial science, "soap took shape as a technology of social purification, inextricably entwined with the semiotics of imperial racism and class denigration", so is the current Christian religious attitudes and discourses of the black female body tools of imagined social and racial purification.

3. The Black female body as Hypersexual/Oversexed

The Church and its grapple with black female sexuality is a longstanding affair. The Christian religious view of morality and righteousness centers on women's sexualities and the control and management thereof. Across South Africa, Sunday sermons are littered with warnings of engaging in sex pre-marriage and the dangerous consequences that follow e.g. punishment from God for disobeying His will and tempering with His 'holy temple'. The narratives include 'wait until marriage', 'wait for your husband', and 'the wait is Godly'. The sermons on sexual abstinence are mostly and often solely directed at women, as Chisale and Moyo (2016:90) affirm "the Church shapes women's sexuality as early as their childhood and adolescence stages […] [and] it is always the girl child that is put to test both through church practices and traditional cultural practices". The Church and its use of the Bible has created and maintains a culture which denies women of their autonomy over their bodies and sexualities, "denial of autonomy suggests that married [and unmarried] women lack self-determination in terms of when, where and how to have sex" (Muguti and Sande, 2019:189). In the Church context, when black female sexuality is acknowledged, it is for the benefit of men and following the footprints of imperial and colonial science, the Church also sexually objectifies black women. The Church dictates women to elongate their labia, be of a certain body weight, and perform certain sexual tricks for the satisfaction of their husbands (Muguti and Sande, 2019).

As mentioned, the Christian religious response to the black female body is regulation, and this is done through purity culture, the equating of virginity as pure and engaging in sexual

activities as immoral, corrupt, and sinful. Indeed, “the message of abstinence implies that the church views virginity until marriage as a sign of purity” (Chisale and Moyo, 2016:89). The cult of virginity is a tool to not only control women's sexual behaviour but to ensure further that women continually conform to the norms and traditions of the Church (Kanaan, 2022). This form of regulation is “very strict and intolerant, and once virginity is lost, together with its concomitant honour, it cannot be repaired or restored. It is an all-or-nothing social arrangement with no room for regrets or a second chance” (Ghanin, 2015:19 in Kanaan, 2022:18). In Cape Town, the Anglican Church set up organizations intended to encourage young people (especially young women) to respect the "divine law of human fertility" (Richardson, 2020:42), in other words, to refrain from sexual intercourse before marriage. In the *Ibandla lamaNazaretha* also known as the Shembe Church, female virginity is taken to be of such significance that those who are virgins have some special rituals reserved for them alone, these are *iNtanda* and *umgonqo* (Sithole, 2016). The Shembe Church's virginity cult is not only in church ideologies and beliefs but is further manifested in real practice in the form of “…virginity testing that takes place in large congregational meetings; in July especially, normally from the second to the third of July” (Sithole, 2016:88). Women in the church can also devote their virginity to the Church, a Shembe version of nuns (Kiernan, 1992), as female virginity is significant to the construction of the Shembe Church and its community (West, 2006).

These current Christian religious reactions to the (black) female body are informed and influenced by 19th-century imperial scientific and colonial assumptions of the black female body as hypersexual, meaning that black women cannot control their sexual urges. The black female sexuality is seen as excessive, dangerous, and contagious (Arnfred, 2004). The religious obsession to have autonomy over the bodies of black women and their sexual lives is a nervous grapple and belief of imperial scientific conceptions of ‘African sexuality’ as “…characterized by ‘permissiveness’, indicating that having sex is as simple and straightforward as eating or drinking” (Caldwell et al., 1989:195 in Arnfred, 2004:67). Relentlessly, Christian missionaries have for a hundred years tried to change the so-called hypersexuality of Africans without much success (Arnfred, 2004), however, these Christian efforts persist in the postcolonial Church today. The ‘Eurasian’ obsession with black female sexuality and sexual purity continues, although blanketed as African culture and tradition precolonization. To imperial science and the colonial gaze “black females do not merely

represent the sexualized female; they also represent the female as the source of corruption and disease" (Gilman, 1989:303 in Arnfred, 2004:66), case in point, Sarah Saartjie Baartman.

For 19th-century science, the black female body represented an animalistic sexual appetite so uncontrollable that black women went as far as having sexual intercourse with apes (Gilman, 1985). Popular scientific discourses of the black female body maintained "their [black women] "voluptuousness" is "developed to a degree of lascivity unknown in our climate, for their sexual organs are much more developed than those of whites" (Gilman, 1985:212-213). Furthermore, "the black female was widely perceived as possessing not only a "primitive" sexual appetite but also the external signs of this temperament – "primitive" genitalia" (Gilman, 1985:213), and this determined the black female body as not only inherently different but sexually deviant and an anomaly. Just as the 19th-century scientific and colonial gaze viewed the black women in the form of Sarah Baartman's genitalia and buttocks as capturing her essence and being, so is the current Christian religious attitudes to the black female body reduce it to dangerous and oversexed genitalia synonymous with sin and heathendom. Christianity's obsession with female sexuality and regulating it is an inheritance of Victorian science's obsession with the black female genitalia. The black female sexuality seen as a threat and anomalous was justified by so-called scientific discoveries that "the hymen in black women "is not at the entrance of the vagina, as in the white woman, but from one-and-a-half to two inches from its entrance in the interior" (Turnipseed, 1877:32, 33 in Gilman, 1985:216). Charles Darwin himself saw the buttocks of the black woman as an indication of the primitive, freakish nature and essence of the black female (Gilman, 1985). "When the Victorians saw the female black, they saw her in terms of her buttocks and saw represented by the buttocks all the anomalies of her genitalia" (Gilman, 1985:219). The black woman's inherent primitive lasciviousness is claimed to be symptomized by adultery and virginity having no meaning for her, thus the black female qualities are those of the prostitute, "Abele de Blasio, makes this grotesquely evident: he published a series of case studies on steatopygia in prostitutes in which he perceives the prostitute as being, quite literally, the Hottentot [or the black woman]" (Gilman, 1985:229).

Carl Linnaeus, the scientist known for his classification system also classified black people (the Khoisan) as less than human based on his perception of their genitalia. The scientific view was that Khoisan men had one testicle and the Khoisan woman had an elongated clitoris and labia minora (Abrahams, 1997), which explained the oversexed nature of black people,

especially black women. “The counting of testicles had given way to measurements of the labia” (Abrahams, 1997:41). Informed by the science of his day of the animalistic and subhuman nature of black people, Francis Galton was of the view that Africans were below the ability and intelligence of Europeans (Jackson Jr and Weidman, 2005). Known as the founder of Eugenics – the idea that people with good qualities should be encouraged to reproduce and bad people discouraged – Galton believed, “man can breed from the best, or he can eliminate the worst by segregation or sterilization” (Jackson and Weidman, 2005:71). For Eugenicists such as Galton, race improvement was important for civilization building. The believed inherent subhumanness of the black race and the claimed hypersexual nature of black women led to proposals of mass sterilization, “beginning always with the criminal, the diseased, and the insane, and extending gradually to types which may be called weaklings rather than defectives, and perhaps ultimately worthless race types” (Jackson and Weidman, 2005:77). The attempts to regulate the black body and black female sexuality went from scientific sterilization to religious virginity cults, both informed by the same racist and sexist discourses of the savage insatiable sexuality of the black woman. The colonial and imperial gaze that prodded the black female body gave way to the religious gaze. Upon the black female body of Sarah Baartman, scientific racism was built which justified and supported the mission to civilize Africans (Abrahams, 1997). This civilizing mission continues and is reinforced and perpetuated in every Church service where the black female body is contorted to be less deviant, vile, and less sexual.

4. The Black female body as unruly, mysterious and primal

> “To the nineteenth century religious sensibility – keenly attuned revealed anatomy – the treatment of the domesticated physique was an everyday sacrament. In cleaning it, housing it, curing it and clothing it lay the very essence of civility” (Comaroff, 2002:220 in Dhlamini, 2016:21)

The conversion of Africans to Christianity included a focus on clothing. Missionaries deemed it unacceptable for African Christian converts to attend church services wearing animal skin garments that exposed their bodies (Dhlamini, 2016). The transformation of Africans was done through rituals such as Baptism, the cleansing of the body was taken to signify a break with the sinful past of Africans represented by their traditional dress and lifestyle (Dhlamini,

2016). “Thus the concept of covering oneself with clothing came into play during the process of becoming ‘civilised’ and Christian. After the transformation process through baptism, converted Africans were required to portray their new identity by wearing white garments” (Dhlamini, 2016:22). Putting on clothes was a way of African converts covering their “Africanness” and black skin, as white signified purity and godliness, “the white robes became a direct link to civility, as it required converted Africans to change their lifestyles to fit into the new realm of Christianity” (Dhlamini, 2016:24). This civility came in the form of Church uniform/clothing, especially in the case of black women.

The black female body as animalistic and unruly is a 19th-century scientific assumption that is manifested in obvious and specific ways in the postcolonial Church today. In my religious context, attending Church requires physical polishing. The phrase ‘dressing your Sunday best’ is a philosophy embodied every Sunday service in clean, crisp, perfectly ironed garments adorned with elaborate ‘first lady hats’. In the Old Apostolic Church (AOC), it is culture to look prim and proper, to put on a decent and 'civil' act and to be 'good' in Christian performativity. It is in this pursuit of being a ‘good’ Christian that many denominations across South Africa claim a complete break with African culture and traditions. In this context, “Africanness” and all that it entails becomes primitive in the face of being *born again* (Meyer, 1998). The modern Christian concern is its converts breaking with African traditional practices such as so-called ancestor worship, traditional medicine and rituals – in the fear of converts breaking with ‘civilization’ and relapsing back into heathendom and paganism (Meyer, 1998). “By emphasizing continuously that being *born again* entails a ‘complete break with the past’, pentecostalists [in Africa] even celebrate the notion of rupture much more than nineteenth and early twentieth-century Protestant missionaries” (Meyer, 1998:318). Against this backdrop, modernization and civilization mean flamboyance – dressing in the latest fashion, driving expensive cars, and preaching the Prosperity Gospel (Meyer, 2004).

Church uniforms have had a significant role across denominations in South Africa (Moripe, 1998). In the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC), a Pentecostal movement originating in the 19th century, clothing and how the body is presented are crucial dimensions of the Church (Moripe, 1998). The Church requires women to dress in modest clothes that cover the body and head, furthermore, female contraception is prohibited (Moripe, 1998). “The women of the church wear what Comaroff labels as the “standard transformation of the Protestant model”: calf length straight skirts, a Victorian tunic with rounded collar and a neat headscarf. The

tunic is daffodil-yellow, while the skirt is normally blue or bottle green" (Alcock, 2008:30 in Dhlamini, 2016:40). The women also have a khaki uniform strikingly similar to the British Army's women uniform today, in alignment with the ZCC's mission to be representations of God's Army (Dhlamini, 2016).

The Methodist Church, known as the "church of blood" (Dhlamini, 2016:42), relating to the blood of Jesus Christ and its salvation. The white colour in the church's uniform is linked to purity and the black is linked to the "law" (Comaroff, 1985:222 in Dhlamini, 2016:42). Women adorn themselves with the colour red to symbolize the blood of Jesus that cleans sin, through black skirts and white hats and collars as conveying hope (Dhlamini, 2016).

In the African Christian context, the black body is also covered with *Izambatho,* usually white gowns believed to be sacred and godly, not mixing with that deemed unholy. "*Izambatho* was not and could not be part of their daily life as humans on earth. When they were 'ordinary people' who went on with their daily lives they dressed in their traditional clothes" (Dhlamini, 2016:25). The prevalence of uniform in the black Church, particularly concerning women's bodies, is an attempt of managing the assumed unruly and animalistic nature of black female bodies by covering them with clothing deemed holy and pure to make them morally acceptable.

Having encountered indigenous people in South Africa, missionaries denied Africans of having religion. In the colonial and missionary context, the presence of religion in a society equated to civilization, morality, and order (Chidester, 1996). Missionary Robert Moffat, "based on his Southern African evidence, […] argued strenuously against any theory of natural religion. Reports from Southern Africa, he argued, refuted any philosophical presumption about innate, intuitive, or natural religious ideas" (Chidester, 1996:187). In his own words, Moffat asserts; "while Satan is obviously the author of the polytheism of other nations, he has employed his agency, with fatal success, in erasing every vestige of religious impressions from the minds of the Bechaunas, Hottentots, and Bushmen" (Moffat, 1842:18386, 199, 233 in Chidester, 1996:189). Similarly, John Colenso observes; "like other Kafirs, the Zulus, in their wild, savage state, are excitable and fierce, and debased with the vices and superstitions of heathenism…Like other Kafirs, also, the Zulu have no idols, and it has been a common charge against them, as against the whole of the Kafir race, that they have no God." (Chidester, 1996:133).

In 1905, visiting Durban, James Stark Browne recalled seeing Zulu men “in all their savagery of war array" singing songs and shouting "with very weird effect" (Chidester, 2014:32). Zulu savagery was on full display. “According to Browne, the authenticity of this performance, something that “needed to be seen to be properly appreciated,” was certified by the savage costumes, rhythms, and ferocity of the Zulu dancers. In their “barbaric array of skins, ornaments, feathers, and most wonderful variety of headdresses,” some nearly naked, others in “fantastic costumes as quite to baffle description,” the dancers appeared “grotesque in the extreme” (Chidester, 2014:32). Such perceptions of “Africanness” and

The black body conceptualized as wild and impulsive, therefore unruly and animalistic relates to African traditions and cultures as an unknown and threatening terrain. With this view comes the impulse of the Christian religion to contain the black body by no longer allowing its African converts to participate in traditional rituals such as the burning of impepho, bodily markings, and animal sacrifices are claimed as heathen and savage. These prohibitions of African culture and traditions are still maintained by the contemporary Church across the country.

Britain was “defined by its outsides: without Empire there was no England, without barbarism there was no civilization. Visiting South Africa in 1905, the British Association for the Advancement of Science entered a field of circulations—indigenous, colonial, and imperial—that were crucial to the production of knowledge in all of the sciences as well as within the empire of religion” (Chidester, 2014:31). Much of 19th-century Christian religious ideas were constructed using ‘the Other’, the claimed lack of religion in the indigenous people of South Africa was a way of affirming Christianity as ‘true’ religion and the British identity as enlightened and civilized. This pattern of ‘Othering’ is also evident in current Christian religious discourses of the black female body, where the black body is ‘Othered’ to prove the moral efficacy of Christian religiosity.

In this chapter, I hypothesized that the current Christian religious discourses of gender and attitudes toward black female bodies, namely the exclusion of menstruating women from partaking in holy communion and prayers, the exclusion and suspension of pregnant unmarried women from the Church until well after giving birth, women being required to wear different Church uniforms depending on whether they are virgins, wives, or widows, has to do with faith traditions or denominational preferences, but also is a product of how the

colonial gaze saw the black female body and how imperial science conceptualized the black female body as (1) source of pollution and contamination, (2) oversexed/hypersexual, and 3) unruly, mysterious and primal. The chapter first discussed and gave examples of how the Church today responds to the black female body and its attempts to regulate it. I then explored three ways in which I see imperial science being applied in reaction to the black female body.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

As I come to this concluding part of this dissertation, I have decided to simply map and set out several overarching reflections that remained with me as I drew to the end of my study. I recognise that my examination of the field has not been exhaustive, but I wanted to insert myself as a black philosophy and religion scholar, and ask somewhat related questions about how the bodies and lived experiences of black women have been dealt with during the early years of the science-religion relationship, and to consider the possible ways that it might still shape how postcolonial churches engage with black women's bodies, sexuality and pleasure.

Religion and Science

Undertaking the study has illuminated the intimate ties between religion and science, how the two fields are not only in dialogue and exchange but in important ways, influence each other. Working through this study has fed my interest in philosophy and science, but looking at that relationship as a black woman – looking at how the field viewed black women's bodies has been exhausting and provocative. As the paper has demonstrated, much of what we conceive of as postcolonial religious formations, rituals and practices in South Africa – when looked at through this lens can be viewed as also a product of colonial science and morality. The interrelations between science and religion are vast, and what this study has explored is the beginning of my academic research of the colonial entanglements of the two domains and what they mean for us in Africa today. I think more research of science and religion is needed in the South African landscape, and very specifically to be explored from the perspective of women of colour. Through this study, I hope to have made a small contribution towards this end, by asserting my passion for religion and science and by insisting that we ask questions not ordinarily asked of the field in Southern Africa.

Religion, Science and Gender in the postcolonial context

Now, whilst religion and science as a field of inquiry, have enjoyed a long, illustrious and productive relationship in the academy, the Christian church often looks to science to engage with questions of ecology, bioethics, bodily ethics and sexual morality to inform the evolving field of Christian Ethics.

However, when it comes to asking questions about the colonial entanglement of science and religion, with specific reference to religion or church, I found that there was paucity of scholarship. Firstly, what this study touches on is to expose, to some extent, the dubious, murky and problematic history between science and religion in the late colonial period, especially in the way that it has seen black bodies and black women's bodies, in particular – and then to ask tougher questions about how those perceptions of black women's bodies have been used to underscore certain moral and social ideas that persist into the operations of the postcolonial church. Secondly, in the postcolonial context, not enough attention has been given to exploring questions of gender and reproductive rights from the perspective of the relationship between science and religion as a way to tackle and test the persistent patriarchy within the church. Lastly, whilst recent social and feminist discourses around reproductive justice and obstetric justice have made quite significant and helpful contributions to women's rights as well as to critical theological discourses, African scholars in the field of religion and science have not engaged sufficiently with how to make a contribution to questions of reproductive and obstetric justice in postcolonial Africa.

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