



UNIVERSITY  
OF  
JOHANNESBURG

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION  
STUDIES



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# Graduation Message!!!



The graduation period finally arrived, and as students graduated on different dates, excitement filled the air. Friends and family gathered to celebrate the culmination of a year or in the case of MA and PhD graduates, years of hard work and perseverance. The Department of Religion Studies is delighted to extend its warmest congratulations to the students who have successfully

graduated this year with an Honours, Masters or doctoral degree. Their dedication, hard work, and intellectual pursuit have been commendable, and we are proud to witness their academic achievements.

As a department, we take pride in nurturing and supporting these promising scholars, and we are confident that they will go on to make meaningful contributions to the field of Religion Studies or in their chosen career paths. We remain committed to fostering an enriching learning environment that encourages critical thinking and focuses on researching and teaching living religions, especially Islam and Christianity. We are confident that our graduates' intellectual insights, ethical values, and critical thinking skills will serve them well in their future endeavors and are looking forward to their continued growth and success. The pursuit of knowledge is a lifelong effort, we encourage our graduates to continue exploring, questioning, and contributing to the field of Religion Studies and beyond.



*Pictures taken during the April graduation: Some students could not attend the graduation ceremony in person; however, they too have succeeded in achieving their academic goals, and we are proud of them.*



## Congratulations to our Honours graduates!

Congratulations to the following students who graduated with a BA Honours in Religion Studies: **Zotha Radebe, Venencia Myrtle Bosman, Tumelo Godfrey Kgwerana, Sibusiso Tshepiso Mokoena, Nontobeko Naledi Mkhwanazi, Lungile Ngubane, Karabo Rikhotso, and Francis Zvigo**. We stand together in congratulating them on this significant achievement, we are looking forward to hearing about their future successes, and hope that they will stay connected as members or friends of our academic community.

We are happy to express our pride in **Francis Zvigo's** exceptional academic achievement as he graduated with a distinction. This achievement highlights Francis's dedication, hard work, and academic excellence throughout the time he was doing his Honours studies in our department. His achievement inspires us all.

## Congratulations to our MA graduates!

We are delighted to announce that **Irshaad Sedick** has successfully completed his Master of Arts (MA) degree in Semitic Languages and Cultures. His dissertation titled "Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī as a Muḥaddith" was a learning journey that enhanced his ability to think critically. We congratulate Irshaad Sedick for his academic achievement. We would also like to acknowledge the invaluable guidance and support provided by his main supervisor, Prof. F Esack, and co-supervisor, Prof. Jonathan Andrew Cleveland Brown. Their mentorship and expertise have been instrumental in Irshaad's success.

We are pleased to announce that **Mthokozisi Samuel Maseko** has successfully completed his Master of Arts (MA) degree in Semitic Languages and Cultures. The MA program offers two distinct pathways: a research-oriented program, where students conduct in-depth research under the guidance of a supervisor toward a dissertation on a specific topic within the field, and a coursework program, where students combine coursework with research leading to a mini dissertation. Maseko, like Sedick, opted for the research-oriented track. His research focused on the topic: "Sunni Political Leadership Theory of Khilāfat, Race, and Gender: Critical Analysis of Two Apparently Contradictory Aḥādīth and its Assimilation by 'al-Qā'ida, Isis, and Tālibān." This investigation sheds light on the dynamics between Sunni political leadership, race, and gender theories. We congratulate Mthokozisi Samuel Maseko and his supervisor, Prof Farid Esack, for this achievement.

## Congratulations to our PhD graduate!

Meet **Dr. Gabrielle (Gabi) Tucker (nee Jacobs)**, who graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) specializing in Biblical and Christian Studies. Her doctoral thesis, which was supervised by Prof S.J (Lilly) Nortjé-Meyer, was titled the “Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonization of Women in the Anglican Church: A Study of the Mothers’ Union’s Innovative Theologies”.

Dr. Tucker obtained her first degree in theology from the Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC) and later enrolled for a one-year program at the College of Transfiguration, an Anglican seminary in Grahamstown. Thereafter, Dr. Tucker went on to pursue her studies in the Department of Religion Studies at the University of Johannesburg. Before enrolling for a BA Honours degree, she completed a bridging course that qualified her for the BA Honours in Religious Studies. After obtaining her BA Honours degree, she successfully completed her MA, also at UJ.



Apart from her academic credentials, Dr Tucker is also an ordained Anglican Priest who serves in the Anglican Diocese of Johannesburg. She currently holds the position of an Archdeacon for Region 1, which comprises nine parishes. In addition to her responsibilities as an Archdeacon, she is also the Rector of Saint Luke’s, Bosmont, and Saint Margaret’s of Antioch, Noordgesig. Dr. Tucker feels that her PhD journey has helped her develop a more interactive and meaningful relationship with the Mothers’ Union. Dr. Tucker is also a family person, she is married to Nicholas Tucker and has two children and two grandchildren.

If you want to know more about Dr. Tucker’s research, you can read the following article: “Defending Innovative Theologies”, which can be downloaded on the following address link: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360676399\\_Defending\\_Innovative\\_Theologies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360676399_Defending_Innovative_Theologies).



# Research Open Day

A hybrid Research Open Day was hosted by the Department of Religion Studies on the 20th of May 2023, and saw students and lecturers showcasing their research work.

**Tumelo Kgwerana**, an MA student and a tutor in the department, fascinated the audience with insights from his Honours research project that he completed in 2022. His presentation was titled "Exploring the Impact of the Church on Marriage among Selected ZCC Members in Marabastad, Pretoria." Following Tumelo's presentation, **Razia Bey**, an Honours student, captivated the attendees with her study titled "Exploring the Impact of Islamic Spirituality Practices on Health Behaviours".



Our department's commitment to understanding living faiths – empirically – led us to include a presentation on research ethics. **Aaishah Lombard**, an MA student specializing in the Study of Islam and an Assistant Lecturer in the department, joined forces with **Tsitsi Bvute**, a PhD student in Biblical and Christian Studies, to deliver a thought-provoking presentation titled "Exploring Ethical Horizons: Navigating Research Ethics in Ethnographic Fieldwork."

The event also showcased international representation as **John Mangwele**, a PhD student presenting remotely from Malawi, shared a segment from his thought-provoking doctoral research. Given the geographical constraints, his presentation was pre-recorded to ensure harmonious delivery, and John actively participated in the proceeding online discussion to answer questions and provide further clarification. The presentation was titled "Exploring Participation of Laity in the Formation of Catholic Clergy in Malawi and South Africa".



Finally, **Dr. Mohammed Shahid Mathee**, a Senior Lecturer in our department, captivated the audience with his talk titled "Going to Timbuktu via its Manuscripts: a written intellectual tradition in Africa." The presentation was met with enthusiastic engagement.

The event had both in-person and virtual participation. This academic gathering was well attended and proved to be an intellectually enriching experience for those of us involved.

## Ethnographic Theology Workshop



The Department of Religion Studies recently hosted a research workshop centered around ethnographic theologies. The workshop was part of a collaborative research project on the continuing sociopolitical relevance of liberation theologies in South Africa that is generously funded by NRF and has members from UJ (**Prof Elina Hankela** and **Dr Clementine Nishimwe**), Wits (**Dr Siphwe Dube**) and the University of Pretoria (**Dr Hlulani Mdingi**). The two-day workshop aimed to equip the attendees, including members of the research project as well as postgraduate students, with essential research tools, particularly focusing on ethnographic methodologies. The first day of the workshop revolved around the theme "Doing African Ethnographic Theology." We were privileged to listen to **Prof. Gerald West** (UKZN), who shared insights on "The Contextual Bible Study as a method in doing (ethnographic) theology?", and **Prof. Christian Scharen** (Union Theological Seminary, Chicago), who explored the current trajectory of the ethnographic theology discourse in his presentation titled "Where is the ethnographic theology conversation going now?". The second day focused on using Focus Groups as a tool in the context of ethnographic theological work. Presenters for this day were **Dr. Letitia Smuts** (UJ), **Dr. Clementine Nishimwe**, and **Dr. Sithembiso Zwane** (UKZN). The research workshop provided a platform for intellectual exchange, meaningful discussions, and advancing the research capabilities of all participants. We are grateful for the collaborative spirit and look forward to witnessing the fruits of the workshop!

## International collaboration



**Dr. Mathee Shahid Mohamed**, participated as a teacher in the Critical Muslim Studies Summer School 2023, hosted in the city of Granada, Spain. During this event, he conducted a series of lectures on "Islam in Africa: a decolonial approach". The classes took place from 13 to 16 June 2023 and received high praise from attendees.

Additionally, we are proud to acknowledge **Dr. Mathee Shahid Mohamed**'s role as the coordinator of the UJ-Birzeit Collaboration. A significant initiative of this collaboration is the "Annual Shireen Abu Akleh Lecture," dedicated to honoring the memory of

Shireen Abu Akleh, a courageous journalist who tragically lost her life on 11 May 2022 at the hands of Israeli soldiers. The inaugural lecture was held on the 24th of May, attracting guests and scholars to reflect on such pressing issues. As part of this collaboration, the department was honored to host **Ms. Juman Quneis**, a lecturer in TV and Radio Journalism at Birzeit University, Occupied Palestine. Ms. Quneis visited our department on Wednesday, 24 May, contributing to enriching dialogues and strengthening ties between our institutions.

In August we were privileged to host **Dr Almila Acka** from Berlin in our department – and learn from her methodological thinking, in particular, as it relates to how we should do Islamic theology. Dr Acka holds the position of Research Group Leader and Associate Professor at the Berlin Institute for Theology, Humboldt University in Berlin.



The Future  
Reimagined

## Latest Publications

A former member of the department, **Professor Viviers** recently published a book chapter titled, "How 'Place' Matters: Materiality, Place Attachment, and Naboth's Vineyard". This chapter forms a part of the book "When Psychology Meets the Bible". In his scholarly analysis, Prof. Viviers examines the biblical narrative of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) highlighting its multidimensional perspective, encompassing "person," "place," and "psychological attachment." By fusing materiality and place attachment, he sheds light on the profound significance of this ancient piece of land, demonstrating why it holds such profound importance. Prof. Viviers suggests that understanding the semiotic ideologies of objects within texts and their influence on human world-making leads to a heightened awareness of our humanness, which is intricately interconnected with both materiality and spirituality while reading texts. The book, published by Sheffield Phoenix Press, promises to be a valuable resource for scholars and enthusiasts alike. The book can be viewed here: <https://www.hatchards.co.uk/book/when-psychology-meets-the-bible/heather-amckay/9781914490279>.

**Dr. Clementine Nishimwe's** paper titled "Transformative Experiences of Intercessory Prayers in a South African Context of Xenophobia" has been published by Ecclesial Practices: Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography. In this article, Clementine explores the effects of intercessory prayers experienced by Black African migrant women within the backdrop of xenophobia. Through an ethnographic study conducted at St Aidan's Anglican Church, Clementine examines the transformative impact of intercessory prayers on the health, wealth, and relationships of the studied women that seemed to challenge the prevailing context of xenophobia. While the observed transformation was geographically and temporally restricted, Clementine argues that the intentional design of certain church practices, tailored to the specific context in which the church operates, can yield transformative outcomes. Her research joins the conversations on the intersection between faith, migration, gender, and social challenges. It can be accessed here: doi: 10.1163/22144417-bja10047.



We would like to bring your attention to a recent interview featuring Prof. Farid Esack, an eminent scholar of Islam, and a former member of the department, on News Africa. During this insightful interview, Prof. Esack addressed the most contentious questions surrounding the topic of "religious 'cults' leading to congregants' deaths." His analysis and perspectives shed light on this sensitive issue, making it a compelling and thought-provoking discussion. For those interested in gaining insights from this interview, we invite you to watch it at your convenience by following this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJVNL7G9UcQ>.



## Other News in the Department

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### MA and Honours cohort proposal presentations

This year has been marked by both productivity and success for our new Honours and MA students, who all presented their research proposals in May and June, respectively. As they presented their research proposals, we witnessed moments of enthusiasm and meaningful discussion. We are in particular grateful for the spirit of collegiality and support among these Honours and MA cohorts.

We are proud of the work they have produced. Many have chosen topics that directly relate to real-life issues within their communities. This unique opportunity allows them to explore and address issues that hold personal significance. Our students engage in various research approaches, including text-based investigations, empirical studies, and ethnographic theology research.

We celebrate all students who presented their proposals. This shows their dedication and commitment to their studies, and we look forward to witnessing their continued growth.



### Application

We are pleased to announce that the online application process for our postgraduate programs – Honours, MA, PhD – is now open for 2024.

Application deadline: **31 October 2023 at 12:00**

For more details and application information, we encourage people to visit: <https://www.uj.ac.za/faculties/humanities/departments-2/religion-studies/> or contact us at: [elinah@uj.ac.za](mailto:elinah@uj.ac.za) or [clouw@uj.ac.za](mailto:clouw@uj.ac.za)

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