



Rewriting the narrative of the infertile female body

Tayla Minnaar

Stellenbosch University
Stellenbosch, South Africa
taylaamyminnaar@gmail.com

Abstract

This article will explore the possible reimagining of the infertile female body through the lens of theology. The rise of feminist movements and socio-political influence has impacted both men and women's identity. Motherhood is still interconnected with the female identity, and this becomes problematic when women experience reproductive loss. Reproductive loss can challenge one's faith and hope. Socially, when it comes to infertility there is still a negative connotation attached to it. This study serves to break the silence on this topic and explore ways to change the narrative surrounding infertility.

Keywords

Feminism; body; infertility; African Theology

Introduction

Mielle Chandler says that "Mother is best understood as a verb, as something one does, a practice which creates one's identity as intertwined, interconnected, and in relation, mothering is not a singular practice, and mother is not best understood as a monolithic identity."¹ Mothering and infertility are opposites; the one focuses on the act of mothering while the latter reminds one of the desires of being a mother and not being able to fulfil it. This article analyses the role of infertility and motherhood through the lens of theology. Although both women and men can experience infertility

1 Mielle Chandler, *Narratives of Mothering: Women's writing in contemporary France*, ed. Rye, Gill. Newark (DE: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 20.

and the desire for children, this study focuses on women experiencing infertility and how theology can be used as a comfort tool.

The female body's narrative, both biological and sociological, has for centuries been written from the perspective of the womb. The physical performance of the womb has played a vital role in defining women's value; this narrative has been a defining role in how women are seen within the cultural and social sphere.² For years there have been countless debates and discourses on mothering. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, due to Eve, women are conflicted with pain through childbirth as punishment. In Catholicism, the figure of Mary is a divine embodiment of motherhood.³ Feminist scholars have grappled with the mothering's contradictions, from women's experience as a mother and infertility, the desire to be a mother. In most cultures, if not all, fertility and parenthood are both highly valued. However, the concern for its implications differs for men and women. For many years the suggested biological view created through culture and religion is that motherhood is an expression of being a woman.⁴ Laney, Hall, Anderson, and Willingham mention in their research that motherhood is consequently interpreted through religion as an extension to being a woman.⁵ This view has been challenged by theological scholars such as Mercy Oduyoye and Serene Jones, feminist scholars Simone de Beauvoir and Karen O'Donnell. These scholars' voices will be used within this article to unpack the notion of motherhood from a feminist perspective.

Scripture might not speak of an ethics of reproduction, but the biblical narratives read, studied, and reflected upon shape our view of infertility. Cox says that "scripture indicates, and tradition reaffirms, that children

2 Tayla Minnaar, "Is ovarian cancer the end of womanhood? A feminist theological engagement." Unpublished master thesis. Stellenbosch University, 2018, 102.

3 Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976) 3.

4 Ann Phoenix & Anne Woollett, *Motherhood: Social construction, politics, and psychology*, (London: Sage, 1991) 15.

5 Elizabeth K. Laney, M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, Tamera L. Anderson, Michele M. Willingham, "Becoming a mother: The influence of motherhood on women's identity development." *Identity*, 15, no. 2 (2015): 127.

are a gift from God.”⁶ The laments of Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and Sarah highlight the viewpoint that God could withhold the gift of having a child. In scripture, we see Rachel desperately wanting a child and she is grateful when she bears a son (Gen 30:1–2, 22–24). In ancient times, a childless man solved his problem by having children with a slave or second wife.⁷ However, a childless woman suffers from shame and disgrace. Thus, infertility can be perceived as a sign of disappointment from God and conception as confirming that God is pleased, assuring a woman’s place in the ancient household.⁸

In her chapter on motherhood,⁹ Maritza Kotze argues that mothering is considered “a sacred duty and being childless, voluntary or not is seen as directly opposing the divine command given at creation, ‘to be fruitful and multiply’”¹⁰ (Gen 1:28). Motherhood is often framed with the doctrine of creation as a mother who gives birth to a new life. In her research on motherhood, Lilian Siwila also notes that “motherhood is one of Africa’s most revered and celebrated acts in human life.”¹¹ Within African communities and culture giving birth is celebrated, and in some communities childlessness is associated with the women’s failure to conceive.¹² The biology of the female body reinforces the notion of motherhood, and that a woman’s identity is created and rooted in the womb. Not fulfilling this identity, voluntarily or otherwise, has stirred controversial debates. The freedom of choice becomes imaginary, especially when the female biology is programmed to perform for the womb. This becomes evident through the menstrual cycle.

6 Kathryn Cox, “Towards a theology of infertility and the role of Donum Vitae.” *Horizons*, 40 no. 1 (2013): 29.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 30.

9 Maritza Kotzé, “Mothering as sacred duty and metaphor: The theology of Mercy Oduyoye,” in *Reconceiving Reproductive Health: Theological and Christian Ethical Reflections*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series Volume, 81 (AOSIS, 2019), 81–94.

10 Kotzé, “Mothering as sacred duty and metaphor: The theology of Mercy Oduyoye,” 81.

11 L Siwila, “The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in African Women’s Theology of Understanding Motherhood and Maternal Health.” *Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa*, Special edition, 2, no. 12 (2015): 62.

12 Ibid., 62.

In Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*, she alluded to the notion of a woman being defined through motherhood with the Latin phrase "Tota mulier in utero," meaning "woman is womb".¹³ This insinuates that within a male privileged world, a woman is associated as a mother by reducing motherhood to the womb. Beauvoir's phrase invites us to engage critically with the problematic socio-philosophical and historical consequences of binding women to their reproductive function. For the norms of society police, the metaphor of motherhood, while it does honour some women's experiences, also values women in terms of their capacity to mother and, as a result, romanticises motherhood in terms of care and fertility.¹⁴ Kathryn Cox suggests that on a theoretical level, we assume that we no longer believe the notion of a woman being incomplete unless she has children.¹⁵ The question is: do we still act from the belief that a woman is incomplete unless she can biologically bear a child?

Motherhood

Chigumira defines motherhood as "a set of behaviours, expectations, and responsibilities that constitute culturally defined kinship roles."¹⁶ The care for children can be identified as significant and intersectional to a woman's identity; some sociologists note that women who are childless can achieve motherhood through surrogacy, adoption, or upbringing children of their relatives or friends.¹⁷ According to Sudarkasa, the respect due to mothers who participate in these forms of motherhood, which includes developing, educating, and rearing the children, is not diminished.¹⁸ Motherhood

13 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011) 3.

14 Wesley Baker, "Is Mother other? Desire and the ethics of Maternity." *Theology and Sexuality*, 12, no. 3 (2019): 204.

15 Cox, "Towards a theology of infertility and the role of Donum Vitae," 30.

16 G Chigumira, "Mary as an Inspiration for the Empowerment of Southern African Christian Women Disproportionately Infected/Affected by HIV/AIDS," *The University of Birmingham: University of Birmingham Research Archive*, 134 (2011).

17 N Sudarkasa, "Conceptions of Motherhood in Nuclear and extended Families, with special reference to Comparative studies involving African societies," *JENDA: Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 2, no. 5 (2004): 2.

18 Sudarkasa, "Conceptions of Motherhood in Nuclear and extended Families," 20.

within an African culture¹⁹ includes communal mothering, especially since African motherhood is typically placed within a firm family structure.²⁰

From an African perspective, Oduyoye has written about her own experience of barrenness in an African context. Kaunda²¹ notes that through Oduyoye's story, one can identify the value attached to biological motherhood, and how women are associated with childbirth.²² Oduyoye describes how both the church and African traditions are used as vehicles of oppression against childless women.²³ Oduyoye further unpacks the ideology of motherhood and describes how among the Akan people, childbirth is celebrated as a channel for the return of ancestors, and the community respects the woman who has given birth.²⁴ Kaunda²⁵ notes that through Oduyoye's journey of childlessness, she creates a tool called "child factor" to show how African women are tied to biological reproduction, which views childlessness as a taboo.²⁶ Highlighting the reality of childlessness can result in dehumanising women's lives. Oduyoye calls her narrative a story of women's experience that is yet to be told. Her experience of being childless reaffirms that motherhood is one of the most important aspects of a woman's life within society, especially in African traditions. Within the Western worldview, the concept of motherhood has presented itself as a form of pressure for women; this pressure alludes to the idea that motherhood represents fulfilment.²⁷ The pressure of motherhood creates a limitation of women's choices concerning their lives and careers; many

19 This is a general African culture notion within a westernized African context.

20 Sudarkasa, "Conceptions of Motherhood in Nuclear and extended Families," 20.

21 Chammah J. Kaunda, "Betrayed by Cultural Heritage: Liminality, Ambiguous Sexuality and Ndembu Cultural Change – An African Ecclesia-Ethic of Openness Empire Religions." *Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa Special Edition*, 14, no. 1 (2015): 22.

22 Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 20.

23 Kaunda, "Betrayed by Cultural Heritage," 22.

24 Mercy Oduyoye, "The Passion out of Compassion: Women of the EATWOT third general assembly". *International review of Mission*, 19, no. 1 (1992): 313.

25 Kaunda, "Betrayed by Cultural Heritage," 25.

26 Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 20.

27 M. Rabenoro, "Motherhood in Malagasy Society: A Major Component in the Tradition vs Modernity Conflict," *JENDA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 4, no. 12 (2003): 8.

teenage girls leave their prospective careers to start a family.²⁸ Feminist scholars Judith Butler, philosopher Martha Nussbaum, and anthropologist Saba Mahmood complicate the notion of motherhood further by equating motherhood as a performance.²⁹ Motherhood is influenced by a women's biological sex and her culturally influenced gender, reinforcing a social performance.

Cultural and social influence of motherhood

Gender and cultural studies have indicated that there has been a tendency to emphasize dominant social beliefs regarding motherhood. It is essential for womanhood by continuing endorsing the belief of a woman needing children to be a healthy female individual. Mothers play a crucial role in a child's successful development, psychologically promoting motherhood as necessary for women's psychological wholeness, promoting childlessness as unnatural and pathological.

This view is reflected and enhanced through language that describes women of childbearing age who cannot reproduce as 'barren.' The word 'infertility' in itself is not a neutral term as it invokes a particular framework of understanding. Medical jargon such as 'hostile mucus,' 'blocked fallopian tubes,' and 'failure to conceive' reflects how a woman's infertility is linked to physical impairment.³⁰ While in comparison, male infertility is described using language and concepts such as 'subnormal' and 'low sperm mobility'.³¹ Language describing infertility through terms such as 'barren' and 'sterile' creates an incomplete and inadequate image that reinforces ideological views of motherhood and perpetuates the problem. The term "Bar" also means 'male/man,' suggesting that the term means male not

28 Chigumira, "Mary as an Inspiration for the Empowerment of Southern African Christian Women," 137.

29 Irene Oh, "The Performativity of Motherhood: Embodying Theology and Political Agency," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 29, no. 2 (2009): 3.

30 M. Ulrich and A. Weatherall, "Motherhood and infertility: Viewing Motherhood through the lens of infertility," *Feminism and Psychology*, 10, no. 3 (2000): 325.

31 J.C. Shattuck and K.K. Schwartz, "Walking the Line between Feminism and Infertility: Implications for Nursing, Medicine and Patient Care," *Health Care for Women International*, 12, no. 331 (1991): 331–339.

producing offspring.³² Obstetrician James Duncan was the first to use the word “fertile” to reference women who gave birth, and by the end of the 19th century, the word “infertile” was employed to describe women who remain childless.³³ In the early 20th century, medical professions started describing married women without children as “in need of repair” or “barren,” framing women’s ability to bear children through the lens of the world of machines.³⁴ Carol Vlassoff insists that gender analysis in health should be performed by social scientists as health success is also dependent upon social factors, and in reality are influenced by cultural and political conditions in society.³⁵

One socio-cultural construction that influences notions of infertility is gender.³⁶ Gender refers to “the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities, and attributes that a particular society appropriates for men and women.”³⁷ Both women and men “perform” gender daily, acting out their prescribed gender norms and roles.³⁸ Greenhalgh says that “socially constructed gender ideologies shape the lives of women and men.”³⁹ This is rooted in men’s and women’s consciousness from birth. In most parts of the world, although not all, women’s primary identity is associated with being a wife, procreation, and motherhood while men’s primary identity is that of a breadwinner and protector of their families.⁴⁰

-
- 32 Miranda Larbi, “Women are reclaiming the word barren to talk about their infertility issues.” [Online]. Available: <https://metro.co.uk/2019/07/31/women-reclaiming-word-barren-talk-fertility-issues-10284278/> [Accessed: 1 October 2020].
 - 33 Robin Jensen, “From Barren to Sterile: The evaluation of a mixed metaphor,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 45, no. 1 (2015): 26.
 - 34 Jensen, “From Barren to Sterile: The evolution of a mixed metaphor,” 25.
 - 35 Carol Vlassoff, “Gender differences in determinants and consequences of health and illness,” *Journal of health, population, and nutrition*, 25, no. 7 (2007): 47.
 - 36 A. Greil, K. Slauson-Blevins, J. McQuillan, “The experience of infertility: a review of recent literature,” *Social Health Ill*, 32 (2009): 140
 - 37 Z. Mumtaz, U. Shahid, A. Levay, “Understanding the impact of gendered roles on the experiences of infertility amongst men and women in Punjab,” *Reproductive Health*, 10, no. 3 (2013): 3.
 - 38 C. West, D.H. Zimmerman, “Doing gender,” *Gender and Society*, 1, no.2 (1987): 125.
 - 39 S. Greenhalgh, *Anthropology theorizes reproduction: integrating practice, political, economic and feminist perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 291.
 - 40 Z. Mumtaz, “Gender and reproductive health: a need for reconceptualization,” Unpublished PhD dissertation. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,

Infertility in socio-cultural context

The social-scientific literature on infertility is increasingly emphasizing the importance of the socio-cultural context in shaping the lived experience of infertility. One characteristic of the socio-cultural context that influences infertility is pro-natalism.⁴¹ While all societies are pro-natalist, some emphasize the centrality of motherhood to women's identity more than others.

For example, Israel is an intensely pro-natalist society with state subsidies for IVF and surrogacy.⁴² Remennick studied a small Israeli sample and noticed that none of the women even believed that there was such a thing as voluntary childlessness.⁴³ In developing societies, having children may be the key for women to achieve adult status and gain acceptance in the community.⁴⁴ According to Sundby and Jacobus, in southern Africa, children's birth gives a woman the right to share in her husband's property and wealth.⁴⁵ In Yoruba culture, the adult woman's role depends on motherhood because children are essential to the continuation of lineages.⁴⁶

2002, 100.

- 41 Natalism is a belief that promotes the reproduction of sentient life. The term comes from the Latin adjective for "birth". Natalism promotes childbearing and parenthood as desirable for social reasons and to ensure the continuance of humanity. See D. C. Parry, "Work, Leisure, and Support Groups: An Examination of the Ways Women with Infertility Respond to Pronatalist Ideology." *Sex Roles* 53, no. 5–6 (2005): 337.
- 42 D. Birenbaum-Carmeli, "Cheaper than a Newcomer": On the Social Production of IVF Policy in Israel." *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 26 no. 7 (2004): 897–924; S. M. Kahn, *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
- 43 L. Remennick, "Childless in the Land of Imperative Motherhood: Stigma and Coping among Infertile Israeli Women." *Sex Roles* 43, no. 11–12 (2000): 825.
- 44 M. Hollos, "Profiles of Infertility in Southern Nigeria: Women's Voices from Amakiri." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 7 no. 2 (2003): 50.
- 45 J. Sundby and A. Jacobus, "Health and Traditional Care for Infertility in The Gambia and Zimbabwe," in J. T. Boerman and Z. Mgalla (eds.), *Women and infertility in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Multi-disciplinary Perspective* (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 2001), 258.
- 46 T.O. Pearce, "She Will Not be listened to in Public: Perceptions among the Yoruba of Infertility and Childlessness in Women." *Reproductive Health Matters* 7, no. 13 (1999): 70.

In Cameroon, infertility can be a source of poverty for women.⁴⁷ Because fertility is central to women's identities in developing countries, women and men with fertility problems may resist labelling themselves infertile.⁴⁸

Liberation through theology

Theologically, we can conceptualise gender through the body. According to Pope John Paul II, the female body is viewed within the bounds of Christian traditionalist body theology, which relates the female body with motherly nature. For the pope, this maternal nature differentiates women from men, especially in motherhood. The pope, and many Christians, interpret the purpose of the female reproductive body as being designed for motherhood.⁴⁹ "The whole exterior constitution of a woman's body is in close union with motherhood."⁵⁰ For centuries, the representation of the female body has been linked to procreation, making the move away from the stigmatization of infertility socially, emotionally, and psychologically more challenging.

As mentioned previously, society places a high value on children, and motherhood is still considered by some to be the woman's primary role.⁵¹ This notion of motherhood is perhaps more acute for those who identify as Christian, and having a heteronormative family is considered ideal. However, reproductive loss challenges this idea and, thus, the "primary role" of what it means to be a woman.⁵² Contemporary western society idealises motherhood but construes mothers as passive and silent. If

47 P. Feldman-Savelsberg, "Is Infertility an Unrecognized Public Health and Population Problem? The View from the Cameroon Grassfields," in M.C. Inhorn and F. van Balen (eds.), *Infertility around the Globe: New thinking on Childlessness, Gender, and Reproductive Technologies: A View from the Social Sciences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 215.

48 J. Barden-O'Fallon, "Associates of Self-Reported Fertility Status and Infertility Treatment-Seeking in a Rural District of Malawi," *Human Reproduction*, 20, no. 8 (2005): 2229.

49 Chigumira, "Mary as an Inspiration for the Empowerment of Southern African Christian Women," 209.

50 Ibid.

51 Ann Oakley, Ann McPherson, Helen Roberts, *Miscarriage* (Glasgow: Fontana: 1984), 8.

52 Gayle Letherby, "The meaning of Miscarriage," *Women Studies International Forum*, 16, no. 2 (1993): 167.

mothers speak out, they are often vilified by the media, as is the case in the recent debates over breastfeeding children in public.

Karen O'Donnell comments that "Alongside this perceived failure in fulfilling the role of a woman, many women who experience reproductive loss report intense feelings of self-blame for the loss of the pregnancy."⁵³ In the days after a reproductive loss, some women might question their activities, and questions about God and providence might arise. Theologically, the experience of reproductive loss could challenge the Christian faith. From a faith perspective, there is little hope to be found in the experience of reproductive loss. It could be a place where theological questions and doctrines intersect with one another, and with the lived reality of the woman who experiences this loss.⁵⁴ These questions of God, divine providence and anthropology, need to be viewed as an opportunity for theological reflection. O'Donnell raises the following questions and asks what challenges infertility poses to women, couples, or a community: Is our tradition flexible enough to understand a woman or man as fully human, without being a biological parent? More specifically, what theological and ecclesial resources exist to begin developing a theology of infertility that could answer these questions?⁵⁵

Theology of the womb

Sewpaul argues that people turn to religion to understand and explain life's circumstances that move beyond their control.⁵⁶ For most, depending on one's conception of God and one's perception of oneself, religion can be a source of strength or a source of suffering. According to Covington,⁵⁷ most people experience and go through a momentary phase of disappointment in God and a reversal in faith – a grief process. Our Creator creates women

53 Karen O'Donnell, "Reproductive loss: towards a theology of bodies." *Theology and Sexuality*, 25, no. 1 (2019): 7.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 V. Sewpaul, "Culture religion and infertility: A South African perspective." *The British Journal of Social work*, 29, no. 5 (1999): 741.

57 J. Covington, "Crime and Heroin: The Effects of Race and Gender." *Journal of Black Studies*, 18, no. 4 (1988): 486.

to play an intimate role in creation; this invitation is costly. Christy Bauman says that “the creation story ends with God creating a woman and it is a woman that births a saviour.”⁵⁸ This insinuates women’s birth right as one of co-creating a narrative by birthing life, continuing the creation story by building a life within her womb.⁵⁹

According to O’Donnell, “an embodied theology of reproductive loss recognises a woman’s body as both a theological landmark and a gravesite.”⁶⁰ When a woman experiences a miscarriage, the same womb that gives life can, in return, be the same place where life is lost. O’Donnell further states that “a woman’s body as a theological landmark is a site of unanswered theological questions and an incomplete rite of passage, her body is the primary mode of interpreting the event that has taken place.”⁶¹ There is no theological value in reproductive loss, although some people feel they have learned something in the process of recovering from reproductive loss. However, one can build on the work of Serene Jones, to further elaborate a theological reflection on reproductive loss.

Through Jones’s use of remapping, she is focused on creating a new lens to help theologians grapple with complex theories and notions. Jones says that “feminist theory seeks not to generate a static set of principles but to analyse the signpost of thinking.”⁶² Jones uses ‘women’s nature and identity’ and lays it over a landscape of theological doctrines. According to Jones, Christian doctrines are not “a set of strict principals and static beliefs but rather doctrines of lived experiences, imaginative landscapes in which one’s faith is shaped through their Christian identity.”⁶³ As human beings, we cannot truly understand nor comprehend the fullness of the creation narrative in all its glory. Jones says that “we cannot see it as God sees it.”⁶⁴

58 Christy Bauman, *Theology of the Womb: Knowing God through the body of a woman* (Oregon: Cascade books, 2019), 69.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Serene Jones, *Feminist theory and Christian theology: Cartographies of grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 50.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., 52.

Instead, we experience hope through a lens of uncertainty and darkness, through which culture, history, communities, politics, and patriarchy has shaped our self-identity and our lived experience.⁶⁵ Through theology, the core doctrine that drives the notion according to which women are to be seen as fully human, we are recipients of grace and that as Christians, we are called to follow God's will and seek out ways to flourish. Through the transformative power of God's grace, we as Christian beings can be transformed, be redeemed, and reborn again through this perspective. Thus, the notion of motherhood that oppresses women can be reformed, and communities can be redefined in grace.⁶⁶

Practically, as a church community, we could implement changes encouraged by those like Mercy Oduyoye in addressing the silence and suffering of infertility. By accepting the spiritual element of infertility, one can engage with resources within the Christian tradition to help the congregation confront their loss, hold onto hope, and heal.⁶⁷ The church can, during particular holy days such as Christmas – which focuses on the birth of Jesus Christ, a baby, as well as Father's and Mother's days – be more inclusive through seeking ways to recognize the pain of longing for parenthood. By changing and adapting, focusing on the Holy Spirit's power and the gifts provided to the church, these gifts that are beyond the usual gifts from God and that include, but are not limited to, children.⁶⁸

Conclusions

For centuries, normative views of women's nature and their reproductive differences have historically been used to hinder and oppress instead of promoting growth in women's flourishing.⁶⁹ Reproductive needs and concerns are not limited to infertility, since mothering should not exclude lesbian mothering and male mothering. In the contexts of South Africa,

65 Minnaar, "Is ovarian cancer the end of womanhood? A feminist theological engagement," 103.

66 Jones, *Feminist theory*, 52.

67 Cox, "Towards a theology of infertility and the role of Donum Vitae," 46.

68 Ibid.

69 Jones, *Feminist theory*, 51.

the voices of the many different aspects of women's lives and experiences need to be heard, especially within the church. Therefore, it is essential to reconstruct a new lens in which we view motherhood and childlessness, a lens that is inclusive and liberates women from a potentially exclusive notion such as motherhood. This study serves as a reminder that there is always room to reshape our understanding of the Christian doctrine, and we should continuously create safe spaces for those suffering within the church.

Bibliography

- Barden-O'Fallon, J. "Associates of Self-Reported Fertility Status and Infertility Treatment-Seeking in a Rural District of Malawi." *Human Reproduction*, 20, no. 8 (2005): 2229–2236.
- Bauman, Christy. *Theology of the Womb: Knowing God through the body of a woman*. Oregon: Cascade books. 2019.
- Birenbaum-Carmeli, D. "Cheaper than a Newcomer: On the Social Production of IVF Policy in Israel." *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 26 no. 7 (2004): 897–924.
- Covington, J. "Crime and Heroin: The Effects of Race and Gender." *Journal of Black Studies* 18, no. 4 (1988): 486–506 .
- Cox, Kathryn. "Towards a theology of infertility and the role of Donum Vitae", *Horizons*, 40 no. 1 (2013): 28–52.
- Chandler, Mielle. *Narratives of Mothering: Women's writing in contemporary France*, ed. Rye, Gill. Newark DE: University of Delaware Press. 2009.
- Chigumira. "Mary as an Inspiration for the Empowerment of Southern African Christian Women Disproportionately Infected/Affected by HIV/AIDS", The University of Birmingham: *University of Birmingham Research Archive* (2011).
- De Beauvoir, S. *The second sex*. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. (Trans). New York: Vintage Books. 2011.

- Feldman-Savelsberg, P. "Is Infertility an Unrecognized Public Health and Population Problem? The View from the Cameroon Grassfields," in M.C. Inhorn and F. van Balen (eds.), *Infertility around the Globe: New thinking on Childlessness, Gender, and Reproductive Technologies: A View from the Social Sciences*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2002, 215–232.
- Gerrits, T. "Social and cultural aspects of infertility in Mozambique." *Patient Educ. Counsel* 31, no. 1, 39 (1997): 39–48.
- Greenhalgh, S. *Anthropology theorizes reproduction: integrating practice, political, economic and feminist perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995.
- Greil, A.; Slauson-Blevins, K.; McQuillan, J, "The experience of infertility: a review of recent literature." *Social Health Ill*, 32 (2009): 140–62.
- Greil, A.; Slauson-Blevins, K.; McQuillan. "The social construction of Infertility". *Sociology Compass* 5, no.8 (2011): 736–746.
- Hollos, M. "Profiles of Infertility in Southern Nigeria: Women's Voices from Amakiri." *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 7, no. 2 (2003): 46–56.
- Jensen, Robin. "From Barren to Sterile: The evolution of a mixed metaphor." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 45, no. 1 (2015): 25–46.
- Jones, S. *Feminist theory and Christian theology: Cartographies of grace*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.
- Kahn, S.M. *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2000.
- Kaunda, Chammah J. "Betrayed by Cultural Heritage: Liminality, Ambiguous Sexuality and Ndembu Cultural Change – An African Ecclesia – Ethic of Openness Empire Religions." *Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa Special Edition*, 14, no. 1 (2015): 22–44.

- Kotzé, Maritza. “Mothering as sacred duty and metaphor: The theology of Mercy Oduyoye”, *Reconceiving Reproductive Health: Theological and Christian Ethical Reflections*, Reformed Theology in Africa Series Volume, 81 (2019), 81–94.
- Larbi, Miranda. “Women are reclaiming the word barren to talk about their infertility issues.” [Online]. Available: <https://metro.co.uk/2019/07/31/women-reclaiming-word-barren-talk-fertility-issues-10284278/> [Accessed: 1 October 2020].
- Laney, Elizabeth K., Elizabeth M., Lewis Hall Tamera; Anderson, L.; Willingham, Michele M. “Becoming a mother: The influence of motherhood on women’s identity development”, *Identity*, 15, no. 2 (2015): 126–145.
- Minnaar, Tayla. “Is ovarian cancer the end of womanhood? A feminist theological engagement.” Unpublished master thesis. Stellenbosch University, 2018.
- Mumtaz, Z. “Gender and reproductive health: a need for reconceptualization”, Unpublished PhD dissertation, The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2002.
- Mumtaz, Z.; Shahid, U.; Levay, A. “Understanding the impact of gendered roles on the experiences of infertility amongst men and women in Punjab.” *Reproductive Health*, 10, no. 3 (2013).
- Ann Oakley, Ann McPherson, Helen Roberts, *Miscarriage*. Glasgow: Fontana: 1984.
- O’Donnell, Karen. “Reproductive loss: towards a theology of bodies”, *Theology and Sexuality*, 25, no. 1 (2019): 1–14.
- Oduyoye, M.A. “The Passion out of Compassion: Women of the EATWOT third general assembly.” *International review of Mission*, 19, no. 1 (1992): 313–318.
- Oduyoye, M.A. *Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space. Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell*, edited by Margaret A. Farley and Serene Jones, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991.

- Oduyoye, M.A. 2001. *Introducing African Women's Theology*. 1 ed. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Oh, Irene. "The Performativity of Motherhood: Embodying Theology and Political Agency." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 29, no. 2 (2009): 3–17.
- Pearce, T.O. "She Will Not be listened to in Public: Perceptions among the Yoruba of Infertility and Childlessness in Women." *Reproductive Health Matters* 7, no. 13 (1999).
- Parry, D.C. "Work, Leisure, and Support Groups: An Examination of the Ways Women with Infertility Respond to Pronatalist Ideology." *Sex Roles* 53, no. 5–6 (2005): 337–346.
- Phoenix, A.; Woollett. *Motherhood: Social construction, politics, and psychology*, London: Sage, 1991.
- Rabenoro, M. "Motherhood in Malagasy Society: A Major Component in the Tradition vs Modernity Conflict", *JENDA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 4, no. 12 (2003).
- Remennick, L. "Childless in the Land of Imperative Motherhood: Stigma and Coping among Infertile Israeli Women." *Sex Roles* 43, no. 11–12, (2000): 821–841.
- Sewpaul, V. "Culture religion and infertility: A South African perspective." *The British Journal of Social work* 29, no. 5 (1999): 741–754.
- Shattuck, J.C. and Schwartz, K.K. "Walking the Line between Feminism and Infertility: Implications for Nursing, Medicine and Patient Care." *Health Care for Women International*, 12, no. 331 (1991): 331–339.
- Siwila, L. "The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in African Women's Theology of Understanding Motherhood and Maternal Health." *Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa*, Special edition, 2, no. 12 (2015): 61–76.

- Sudarkasa, N. "Conceptions of Motherhood in Nuclear and extended Families, with special reference to Comparative studies involving African societies." *JENDA: Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 2, no. 5 (2004).
- Sundby, J and Jacobus, A. "Health and Traditional Care for Infertility in The Gambia and Zimbabwe," in J. T. Boerman and Z. Mgalla (eds.), *Women and infertility in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Multi-disciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 2001, 257–268.
- Ulrich, M. and Weatherall, A. "Motherhood and infertility: Viewing Motherhood through the lens of infertility." *Feminism and Psychology*, 10, no. 3 (2000): 323–336.
- Vlassoff, Carol. "Gender differences in determinants and consequences of health and illness." *Journal of health, population, and nutrition*, 25, no. 7 (2007): 47–61.
- Warner, Marina. *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson. 1976.
- West C., Zimmerman D.H. "Doing gender." *Gender and Society*, 1, no.2 (1987): 125–151.
- White L.; McQuillan J. and Greil, A.L. "Explaining Disparities in Treatment Seeking: The Case of Infertility." *Fertility and Sterility*, 85, no. 4 (2006): 853–7.