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**More Than a Church: Health Benefits of Devotion to Shembe Teachings and Lifestyle the case  
of Shembe Congregation in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa**

by

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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## ABSTRACT

Health and well-being have always been one of the issues humans have been concerned with since time immemorial. It does not come as a surprise then that religion is built around the bedrock of wellbeing. The promise of wellbeing is one major pull that religion has on people and thus more than 80% of South Africans identify as religious. The most basic instinct of any species is survival. Survival either through reproduction or otherwise. Humans are the most successful species in that regard as they have various survival tactics that have propelled them to the top of the food chain despite their obvious physical limitations. One discipline which has particularly helped humans in this regard is that of health. With the theme of wellbeing, a recurring one amongst most if not all religious movements, African Churches are no different in this regard. It is for this reason that studying Shembe seemed like something that is worthwhile. It is a prominent African faith followed by millions with its core following in KwaZulu-Natal. To ascertain to what extent are Shembe's teachings not just spiritual but also have health benefits if they are adhered to, this was the primary aim of the study. This is a desktop qualitative study that looked at the enigmatic Shembe people of Ekuphakameni led by V.V Shembe who is the great-grandson of the great Prophet Isiah Shembe, the founder of the church and from whom the Shembe people derive their name. The research was able to establish that indeed, there are some health benefits to adhering to Shembe's teachings and those benefits are not limited to health but also the social life and general communal wellbeing. Teachings like abstinence from smoking, drinking, and pre-marital sex were at the centre of this particular point. However, issues aroused around things like the type of diet Shembe encourages as from his writings, he was quite vague and it is thus open to interpretation. What can be recommended therefore is that further field studies be conducted on Shembe's teachings, the type of diet the astute Shembe follower adheres to and how that may have an effect on their health, lifestyle, and general wellbeing. A desktop study was very limited in that regard. The Shembe community although fragmented and divided is a very large one, it is estimated to be 3 million strong. The collective force of 3 million people working towards the same goal would be overwhelming if it could be harnessed. Isiah Shembe gave AmaNazaretha the correct blueprint for uplifting a community and it is that blue print that AmaNazaretha should turn to. The modern world, while it offers a lot of challenges for the Shembe community, in the midst of those challenges it also offers a lot of opportunity. The Shembe community should be very capable of mobilizing their collective power to build their own educational and financial institutions and others that will cater to the needs of AmaNazaretha and move them closer towards the vision Isiah Shembe had for AmaNazaretha which is a community that is blueprinting with its own value system education, health and economic infrastructure with the state only providing a supporting role. As Isiah Shembe writes and says "wonke AmaNazaretha makabe munye njengebumba likasimende" meaning let all AmamNazaretha unite and let their unity be as strong as cement. Ultimately, for AmaNazaretha to uplift themselves, they need to go back to the teachings of the founder and use them to uplift themselves.

## Declaration

The Registrar Academic University of KwaZulu-Natal Durban, South Africa

I, Phiwayinkosi Wilson Ngcobo (Student number 215063850), declare that the thesis titled: More Than a Church: Health Benefits of Devotion to Shembe Teachings and Lifestyle in the case Shembe Congregation is my original research.

1. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
2. The graphs and other information entailed have been acknowledged.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing unless specifically acknowledged to be sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to his Holiness Inkosi yamaNazaretha as'Ekuphkamen V.V Shembe and the community of AmaNazaretha where I grew up. It is they whom I drew inspiration from to complete this work.

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The process of conducting research and writing a detailed report is a painstaking one that requires one to pour their heart and soul into every stroke of ink put on this paper. Sometimes your cup alone is not enough, and I do not for a second imagine that I could have completed this without friends, family, colleagues and a whole community of people pouring into my cup and making sure that I am able to keep going even in moments where giving up made more sense. First and foremost, I would like to thank my loving wife Mrs Ngcobo who has been nothing but a pillar of strength through this period. The love and support which she along with our kids gave me has been nothing short of amazing and it is their warm hugs and smiles every morning that reminded me that this was indeed worthwhile. The community of Amanazaretha has nurtured me from a very young age and it is close to impossible to imagine who I'd be without their stern but nurturing arm steering toward the right path. I would like to particularly thank his holiness Inkosi V.V Shembe of Ekuphakameni for graciously allowing me to use the congregation which he leads as one of the points of discussion of my study. My ever-understanding colleagues who throughout this very difficult period have remained very supportive and understanding in situations where it might have been justifiable for them to demand more of me however, they remained supportive throughout. Lastly, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Oliver Mtapuri, the amount of work he has put in in order to guide me in this journey could never be quantified and I cannot thank Professor Mtapuri enough. Every stroke of ink was fueled by a community of people and a lifetime learning and unlearning and I would like to reiterate that I do not imagine for a second that any of this would have been possible working without their help, help that stretches out a lifetime.

## Glossary of Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Amakhosi	Traditional Chief
Amakhosazane	Shembe Maiden
Ekuphakameni	Isiah Shembe Headquarters
Nkosi	Shembe Leader
Mvelinqangi	Nguni God

# **Chapter Outline**

## **Chapter 1**

The first chapter introduces the reader to the subject matter of the paper. It provides the reader with an understanding of what is to come and why this study was important while also outlining how it was conducted.

## **Chapter 2**

In this chapter, there is the literature review which has been conducted. It is an extensive overview of relevant literature which has been used and is relevant to this study. The chapter outlines the available data and thus sets out the tone for the reader in terms of identifying the gap that the study aims to fill in the field. It may be a small gap however it is a gap, nonetheless.

## **Chapter 3**

The 3rd chapter looks at the mechanical aspects of the research. The methods and theories used as a way to guide the research and assist in making this a precise study that is accessible to the reader to follow. It is a desktop study that relied largely on secondary data.

## **Chapter 4**

This is the chapter whereby I present the relevant data and also proceed to analyze and present it to the reader. Data are analysed and interpreted in this Chapter.

## **Chapter 5**

In this chapter, there I present the discussion and finally bring it to a close with key findings, recommendations and conclusions.

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The most basic instinct of any species is survival. Survival either through reproduction or otherwise. Humans are the most successful species in that regard as they have various survival tactics that have propelled them to the top of the food chain despite their obvious physical limitations. One discipline which has particularly helped humans in this regard is that of health. Technological advances and medicine have been instrumental in improving the quality of health in the modern era. However, something that has a much bigger influence on the health of a person is the lifestyle they live (Martin,2017). No medical drugs can be a substitute for a proper lifestyle which includes eating habits, sexual habits and a general way of life. Religious organizations and religion, in general, have always been very influential in shaping human societies throughout history. The nature of most faiths entails a fixation on the health and wellbeing of the devotee and thus healing is a central theme in many religions (Gundersen,2000). With that said it is a point of interest to study how certain religious groups and the lifestyle they encourage impact the lives of their devotees. With the theme of wellbeing, a recurring one amongst most if not all religious movements, African Churches are no different in this regard. It is for this reason that studying Shembe seemed like something that is worthwhile. It is a prominent African faith followed by millions with its core following in KwaZulu-Natal. To ascertain to what extent are Shembe's teachings not just spiritual but also have health benefits if they are adhered to. While Shembe's teachings have been viewed as very spiritual ones, this research seeks to establish the more humble and mundane purpose which they served and that this was not merely a coincident but Shembe really did intend for his teachings to be a double- edged sword that helps with spiritual enlighten ment while also improving health (Morton,2017).

## **1.2 Background**

Very little is known with certainty on exactly how the first faith-based organizations or religions emerged. By the time humans began recording their history through writing, many religions were already well established. This meant that centuries of their history could only be traced through

oral history and later, modern archaeology and while these may give an idea, they aren't remotely enough to pinpoint the exact origins (Rappaport, 2019). What many scholars agree on albeit through speculation is that most faiths developed as a response to answer human fears and a response to their existential crisis. Religion in the main aims to do mostly 3 things and that is to control, explain and predict.

Authority figures within any society always look to find means to try and control their constituency and also give them some sort of legitimacy. It is how many monarchies gained their legitimacy, they explained it using divinity, a divine right to rule and thus it could not be challenged (Radcliff-Brown, 1945). There are also significant events of nature that occur like floods, earthquakes, and droughts and when these things occur, religions always offered an explanation. Religion also offered predictions on the outcomes of war, fertility and the weather. Perhaps one of the most common questions all religions want to explain are the existential questions like how we came to be and what happens when we die (Schaefer, 1992). Because this was pre-scientific times, there was no way to find answers to some of these questions and even with today's scientific advancements questions on issues like life after death are still hotly contested (Haught, 2018). These questions are very important questions and people will always want answers and many will accept explanations even if they are based on hunches.

A lot of pre-historic belief systems were based on hunches and somewhat calculated guesses with very little science to back it. The earliest organized religions appear to have been based on fertility and thus there was a fixation on Goddess (Gearhart, 2015). When humans began to learn more about the male's role in procreation there was now an emergence of male deities. Most existing religions teach that they are unique and that come from a revelation by some divine entity like a God (Sanday,1981). For humans to be able to make sense of the world and develop a sense of security in a world that provided very little security of control and in the absence of science, religion proved to be a potent alternative. When most religions speak of their origins, they speak of divine revelations from their deities which sets them apart from other religions. However, religions from India to the middle east often demonstrate similarities that suggest that they borrowed from each other. The story of Jesus Christ found in the New Testament of the bible for instance resembles a lot of Egyptian and Hindu mythology that predate the bible (Bassuk,1987). With that said, very few religions that exist today are completely removed from other religions,

they all share similarities although the expressions and choices of worship may differ. The one thing they all have in common however is a concern for people's health and wellbeing.

### **1.3 The Shembe Church**

The Nazareth Baptist Church or Shembe church is a religious organization established by the Prophet Isiah Shembe in 1910. It is a Nguni-centric religious organization with that adheres to the teachings of the prophet. Isiah Shembe taught about an array of issues that speak to all aspects of the human life and what he was doing was not just teaching about how to take care of one's spiritual health but also physical as the two-work hand in hand. The teachings range from economics, politics, health, social orientation amongst other issues. This research was desktop research study about the diet of Shembe people of Ekuphakameni. These are people who are often misunderstood as merely Zulu Christians however, their beliefs and religious practices are quite distinct once looked at more closely. They're encouraged to keep a healthy diet, with food like pork being strongly discouraged and there is sufficient health research which suggests that pork is the cause of various dangerous viruses (D O'brian, and O'brian., 1959), the use of cooking oil when they are preparing their food is also prohibited. Smoking, alcohol and all forms of drugs and substance abuse is strongly discouraged. One other major component of the Shembe movement which sets it apart from other religious movements is that the Socio-Economic emancipation of its people was set as one of the corner stones of its existence by the founder the great Isiah Shembe. The Congregation was founded in 1910 and they spent almost more than 200 days in a calendar year together as church members.

In his hymn book Shembe wrote "Fear Jehovah, oh generations upon generations, and observe his laws which he, Jehovah, wrote through his Servant, Moses, so that your worship may be acceptable to the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 4:4.) 4. Because if you do not worship him as he decrees, he will not accept your prayers. He can never pour his blessings down upon you if you do not obey his laws and observe them" (IhlabelelozamaNazaretha, 1940). When these laws of Moses are interrogated, they seem to be laws which encourage law, order and social cohesion and that encourages people of Ekuphakameni to also observe and respect the law that was introduced to them to control their diet. In morning prayer that is read every morning he (Shembe) says "You must never be idle. It is a sin to be lazy. A lazy person is like a dog which survives by begging food from human beings. At the end of this prayer, take your hoe and till, that is how you will live,

and refrain from begging food from people”. This proves that Shembe people of Ekuphakameni are encouraged to have garden where they plant their food, and the research proves that the organic food is the one that must be eaten to keep a healthy diet as Faidon et al (2004) would argue that the demand of organic food is increasing because it is well known that it healthier and safer than conventional food. This ethnographic study is therefore seeking to know where his people recognize the culture Shembe introduced to them which if they do will help in development, help reducing mortality and fight issues like poverty.

It is almost impossible for one to speak about the Nazareth Baptist Church without having the much-celebrated Bantu Prophet Isiah Shembe as the point of departure. It is difficult to trace records recording the exact birth date of the Prophet Isiah Shembe however it is estimated that he is likely to have been born around the late 1860s or early 1870s (Hexham, 1996). His birth was during a period of turmoil in South Africa with the most significant events leading to the land dispossession of native black South African and the erosion of the authority traditional leaders (Amakhosi) of the time. His family hails from KwaZulu however his family was displaced during the time of King Sensangakhona and they settled in Harrismith under the protection of King Langalibalele of Amahlubi. There is a divine narrative around Shembe’s birth dating back to the time of his great grandfather who lived in the era of the Zulu King Sensangakhona. Shembe’s great grandfather Mzazela of the Ntungwa clan who are of the Nhlanzi clan, of the Donsa Clan was a loyal servant to King Sensangakhona and it is said that the word of God Mvelinqangi came to him warning him of the turmoil that will come within the Zulu Kingdom when King Shaka ascends to the throne and ordered him to move as Mvelinqangi intended to raise prophets from his progeny (Gunner, 2002). Mzazela moved as he was ordered and settled at Ntabamhlophe (Drakensberg).

Mzazela, the great grandfather of Isiah Shembe had a son and named him Nhliziyiyo. Nhliziyiyo fathered a son and named him Mayekisa. Mayekisa reached adulthood and his father Nhliziyiyo wanted him to take a wife. Mayekisa honored his father’s wish and married Sitheya Hadebe, daughter of Malindi Hadebe who was a member of the high council to King Lanaglibalele of Amahlubi. It is reported that when Nhliziyiyo arrived at the Hadebe homestead and expressed the reasons for his visit, Sitheya wept as she realized the fulfillment of what was revealed to her through the voice of Mvelinqangi since her teenage years. Sitheya was said to be a maiden of great moral clarity who obeyed her parents and did not commit sin.

It is said that Mvelinqangi came to Sitheya in a vision and said “Sitheya, do not pollute yourself in your maidenhood and do not choose a lover, for you will give birth to the servant of God”. When she was pregnant with Shembe, she would frequently see dreams of people wearing white garments, singing a hymn which she did not recognize, and a voice would say to her “You will give birth to the Lord who will save all nations”. When Sitheya went into labor, before the midwives arrived, she felt a hand holding her loins and when she felt this hand, she gave birth without any complications or pain (Hexham, 1996). Isiah Shembe was baptized by William Leshega of the Native Baptist Church on 22 July 1906, and this is an important event as it coincides with the same year the Bhambatha rebellion ended, the last armed resistance led by traditional leaders. Isiah Shembe established the Nazareth Baptist Church only 4 years later and in just over a century of existence, it has grown to be more than just a church.

L.N Shembe, grandson to Isiah Shembe argued that it was indeed a religion in its own right. The Shembe church is perhaps one of the most authentic Nguni churches one is likely to come across. From the dress code where men and women wear cow hide skin, the etiquette during sacred rituals and the rhythm in their hymns when worshipping and dancing all demonstrate the Nguni roots of the church in a beautiful way. The Shembe church, to its people is not merely a church it is in fact a religion in its own right (Oosthuizen, 1993). This Church has drawn interest from several religious scholars seeking to get an understanding of what exactly is Shembeism and quite a lot has been said on that regard. It is worth noting that AmaNazaretha are not homogenous, over the past 40 years there have been a lot of leadership disputes which have led to many splinter groups mushrooming. Many have moved away from Isiah Shembe’s original headquarters of Ekuphakameni. After the untimely passing of J.G Shembe in 1976 (who was successor to Isiah Shembe as the leader) a dispute ensued between A.K Shembe, brother to J.G Shembe and L.N Shembe, son of J.G Shembe (Masondo,2004). The dispute culminated in a split and Rev A.K Shembe lead a breakaway group and settled at the now famous Ebuhleni home while L.N Shembe remained at Ekuphakameni leading another group. In its entirety, the Shembe following is estimated to peak at 3 million with all factions combined with a few smaller branches in countries with Nguni ties like Swaziland and Zimbabwe. There have been other groups which have mushroomed of course however it is not easy keeping track of all of them especially when the research was desktop research.

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The Nazareth Baptist church is one of the oldest organizations in the country boasting an estimated membership of over 3 million (Khumalo,2017). The country is embroiled with various health issues which have caused a strain on the public health services. Many health problems are avoidable with simply lifestyle changes. Thus, this study looks at the what possible positive effect a lifestyle encouraged by the institution like the Shembe church may have on society as a whole.

The Shembe community has historically been ridiculed and many viewed it as a backward religion that needed to be modernized and move away from its conservative traditions (Oosthuizen, 1991). Despite that, the church has grown in leaps and bounds over the years with an estimated following of over 3 million in South Africa and some parts of the SADC region. The growth however has not completely dispelled the perception of a backward rural church that needs to be reformed and modernized. This research shall perhaps help in giving a different perspective to show that the old traditionalist ways which the church subscribes to can in fact provide some solutions to our modern problems. Many within the Shembe congregation follow the teachings of Shembe based solely on faith, it will also help strengthen their faith to know that there is actually scientific evidence that supports their faith. There are many other African Independent Churches that have similar practice to the Shembe church, and this study shall also assist them in launching other scientific studies that look for empirical evidence

The headquarters of the Shembe Church are located at Ekuphakameni in Inanda and the surrounding community benefits immensely from the interest Ekuphakameni draws as it was declared a national heritage site and thus draws interests from tourists from all over the globe which boosts economic activity in the area. Furthermore, the surrounding community is plagued by various social ills, social ills which could possibly be eradicated or at least reduced if they adopted some of the values and teachings found in the Shembe church.

## **1.5 Problem Statement**

South Africa's life expectancy according to 2016 data currently sits at 63.6 years. This is about 9 years younger than the global average life expectancy which currently sits at 72.0 years (WHO,2016). According to Statistics South Africa, 57% of deaths in South Africa are from non-

communicable diseases (Statistics South Africa, 2016). These are diseases which people often get as a result of their behavioral patterns throughout their lives, so the lifestyle one lives has a huge bearing on how long a person lives. What can be deduced from this is that if people can change some of their behavior's, they could have great health benefits which may increase their life span. In essence, the focus of this research is on life expectancy and how behavior can be detrimental to one's life.

With a focus on the Shembe Church (AmaNazaretha AseKuphakameni) and their teachings, possibly establish how these teachings may be more than just for spiritual purposes but could also have a very physical reason for them which improves one's health. In essence, the social ills in South Africa are ravaging the country and they in hand cause other health issues. These problems can (amongst other things) be attributed to a moral decay in the communities and if they are ignored issues of crime, gender-based violence, collapsing of the health services in the country are going to continue to ravage the South African communities without any recourse. Private healthcare in South Africa is expensive and only 27% of South Africans can afforded private healthcare. Public healthcare is hugely underfunded yet caters for 77% of the population is always stretched. There needs to be viable alternatives to just medicine as a solution to healthcare and perhaps encouraging certain lifestyle changes might be the way.

## **1.6 Aims and Objectives of the Study**

In essence, the aim of this study is to establish a link between the religious lifestyle which members lead or the one which the teachings of Isiah Shembe and his successors encourage and the health of the congregants. In other words, is there a causal link between the lifestyle choices encouraged and better health. That is essentially the fundamental question which this paper seeks to enquire on extensively.

## **1.7 Research Questions**

This research seeks to answer an array of questions however the main question that is the gist of the paper is: What are the health benefits that can be linked to living a lifestyle encouraged by Isiah Shembe of the Nazareth Baptist Church or Shembe religion. For the purposes of this research, these are the supporting questions which will help guide the research:

- What are Shembe’s teachings and how can they help with health?
- What assumptions are there regarding these teachings?
- What is the scientific evidence that supports these assumptions?

## **1.8 Limitations of Study**

The Shembe church is one based a lot on worshipping in the outdoors. The very essence of the religion is about being in touch with nature and being at peace with one’s surroundings (Brown, 1995). The best possible study of this movement would entail joining in on their prayer sessions, their dance rituals, conversing with ordinary Shembe devotees and also participating in some major pilgrimages like the annual 54km walk from Ekuphakameni in Inanda North of Durban to Nhlankakazi mountain located in Ndwedwe (Becken, 1968). However, as a result of the pandemic, large gatherings are prohibited as per the lockdown regulations in South Africa. This is the reason behind the resorting to a desktop study as field work would have been difficult if not impossible under the circumstances and a desktop study may not do justice when studying such a vibrant movement that is so full of life. The advantages of this kind of study are how cost effective it is as all the field work costs are cut out like traveling, accommodation, food amongst others. The data being used is also quite easily accessible especially with the access to online and book sources. You are also able to quickly filter the data needed and the data that is not needed which helps focus the research. There are drawbacks to a desktop study of course as some specific data can only be obtained through field work as it the available data can at times either be outdated or not available entirely (Johnson, 2017). There is also the little matter of personal bias which I have as I am a lifelong devotee of the Shembe religion, and this could potentially jeopardise the integrity of the work if I am unable to confront my personal biases. Without proper field work, a lot of gaps in the research may be difficult to fill as field work would have been crucial in data collection. In an ideal world, field work would have been most appropriate in conducting this research but unfortunately, with the global pandemic, things are far from ideal.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has briefly introduced the study. It has given the reader an indication of the motivation behind the study and the theoretical framework which has guided the study. It has also outlined key indicators like the aims and objectives of the study, significance of the study and the limitations

of the study. All this was instrumental in giving a guide as I conducted the study. The next Chapter presents the Literature Review.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

There is a vast history of religion and its influence on the world stretching to the beginning of human civilization. The Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages especially, was somewhat the center of all social and political life in Europe. This literature review shall explore one particular church that being the Nazareth Baptist Church or the Shembe Church and how it influences the lifestyle of its devotees. The particular interest of the research is how the lifestyle impacts on their health and thus the literature shall look at how the church came to be and its policies around health. This literature review also gives an extensive overview of the literature available on religion and how it helps with good health and particularly help us understand why it is still worthwhile to further study the Shembe Church in particular. After reviewing this literature, it will be clearer as to which possible information gaps this research successfully filled in the academic field.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

Essentially this was a study of how human behavior and attitudes towards health can be influenced or has been influenced by their religious beliefs. For this reason, I decided to use the Health Belief Model as my theory of analysis. According to the Health Belief Model, that a person's belief in a personal threat of an illness or disease together with a person's belief in the effectiveness of the recommended health behaviour or action will predict the likelihood the person will adopt the behaviour (Janz et al, 1984). The study looks at how Shembe's teachings influence the health or at least can influence the health of those who adhere to them. The adherence hinges heavily on how much people believe in the teachings. Shembe being revered akin to a deity helps these teachings in the sense that many follow them without question because they believe in Shembe.

### **2.3 Evolution of the Church**

The Nazareth Baptist Church shares an inseparable link with its founder the prophet Isiah Shembe, so much so that the church is more famously known as the Shembe Church even though he named

it the Nazareth Baptist Church when he founded it on 10 March 1910 (Dube, 1935). It is a church that found a way to almost perfectly and seamlessly harmonize the Christian/Jewish religion with the Nguni culture without bastardizing either of the two. A distinct departure from majority of the Christian Missionaries who rivalled him at the time who treated the African way of life as outdated and sometimes evil even and something that ought to be done away with (Cabrita, 2012). This of course was in line with the colonial project to “civilize” and assimilate natives into the western way of life. However, Shembe’s methods proved to be a lot more refreshing and a lot more successful in tapping into the deep rural native crowds. This was exactly because Shembe did not alienate anyone, the Christian, the non-believing native, and everyone in-between all found themselves captivated and mesmerized by Shembe’s methods and while he discourages a lot of things, he had a way of conveying his message that appealed to everyone. The Shembe Church clearly was not a church just for the rural uncivilized people but because of Shembe’s lack of any formal education, it was difficult for the church to dispel of these labels whilst being led by Isiah Shembe (Sithole, 2011).

One gets the feeling Shembe was aware of this which is why he insisted that his two surviving sons Reverend Amos Shembe and Inkosi J.G Shembe both got the education he could never have. J.G Shembe held a Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Fort are and he was the subsequent successor to the prophet Isiah Shembe in leading the church (Oosthuizen, 1981). Under his leadership, it grew rapidly in followers and the codification of Shembe’s prayers and hymns happened under his leadership of the organization. What surprised many religious scholars of the time was that despite the clear development of the organization, it was developing into a more Nguni organization rather than more of a Western Christian organization many expected once the organization had a more “educated leader”. Instead, the Christian Church started to develop into a religion in its own right with Shembe as the center of the organization and the Christian doctrine of Jesus Christ enjoyed much less prominence within the congregation (Cabrita, 2014).

J.G Shembe did not only work with just the religious aspects of the congregation, he did a lot of work to ensure the improvement of the lives of Shembe people by building settlements, helping Shembe people establish their own businesses and also building schools. J.G Shembe clearly demonstrated the benefits of his education in the way he introduced some modern elements to the religion like codified hymns, building schools amongst other things. However, what stood out was

that the essence of the teachings of J.G Shembe were not at all different from that of his father Inkosi Isiah Shembe. In fact, it can be argued that J.G Shembe went further than his father and instead moved the organization towards the direction of a Neo-Nguni religion with Isiah Shembe as the Messianic figure. Due to his Zulu-centric values, J.G Shembe enjoyed the loyalty and following of hundreds of Zulu Chiefs across Kwazulu-Natal as they viewed the Shembe church as one that is in line with their own beliefs and brings them closer to Mvelinqangi, the Nguni God (Sithole, 2011). Because of this kind of following, it gave J.G Shembe legitimacy which turned the Nazareth Baptist Church into one of the largest African Independent Churches in the SADC region.

After leading the church for 40 years, J.G Shembe passed away on 19 December 1976 after a long illness. His passing led to a succession dispute between his younger brother A.K Shembe and his son L.N Shembe. The dispute culminated in the church splitting into two main factions, L.N Shembe remaining at Ekuphakameni as the leader and A.K Shembe leading the larger breakaway group out of Ekuphakameni and founding a new settlement that is today famously known as Ebuhleni. Today Ekuphakameni is led by V.V Shembe, son of L.N Shembe and Ebuhleni is led by Mduduzi Shembe, grandson to A.K Shembe although his leadership is being contested (Heuser, 2008). The church has had more splinter groups mushrooming over the years and it has become difficult to keep track of just how many groups there are however the two original groups of Ekuphakameni and Ebuhleni remain the most prominent ones with the largest following (Echler, 2016). Although these groups disagree on the issue of internal politics, they remain in agreement in everything with regards to the way of life a Shembe devotee ought to live. The church has most certainly evolved in an administrative sense and in terms of its own internal politics, however, with everything else it is really a case of the more things change, the more they stay the same.

## **2.4 World Churches and Health**

The influence of the church or religious organizations throughout history is extremely significant. Faith based organizations have become essential tools in organizing communities and mobilizing them towards health goals (DeHaven, et al, 2004). A recurring theme within the Quran, Bible, Torah and other religious texts is that of healing and wellbeing. What made figures like Jesus Christ so iconic was the tales of their mystic abilities to heal and thus the cornerstone of most religious movements is wellbeing (Loewenthal, 2016). Organizations like the United Nations

collaborate often with global organizations like the World Council of Churches. This is done to assist in stimulating greater conversation amongst faith-based organizations within civil-society networks on a theological level to help develop a perspective on health and its relation to various faiths in the world. The World Council of Churches has a relationship with organizations like UNICEF and UNAIDS and these relations allow the Churches around the world to build a network which works to facilitate and advocate for better church related health networks.

The recent outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic added a very different and controversial element to the relationship between faith-based organizations and health (Vilakati et al, 2020). When news of the outbreak first came out, it was made clear that it spreads mostly through human interactions (Hadi et al, 2020). This became a great challenge for religious gatherings as many faith-based organizations put great emphasis on large gatherings for worship whether it is at a church, a synagogue, a mosque or a Buddhist Temple. The problem with large gatherings in general during the Covid-19 pandemic is that they have been labelled by authorities as high threat or super spreader events. Events which give fertile ground for the virus to infect many people and spread across a large area as religious gatherings often attract people from various walks of life. In South Korea for instance, a major talking point with regards to how religion and health intersect when an outbreak of Covid-19 in the country was traced back to a church gathering (Yezi et al., 2021). In the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, it was reported that a Muslim service in a mosque which was attended by several hundred Muslims resulted in an outbreak where many contracted the virus (Elengoe, 2020). In Washington DC, it is estimated that over 500 congregants attended a communion at an Episcopalian church and those that were reportedly present were amongst many who tested positive for covid-19 soon after.

These types of events prompted authorities to resort to banning such gatherings as a safety measure in an attempt to arrest the spread of the virus (Brannon, 2020). Many religious leaders across the globe were able to appreciate the danger at hand and thus worked together with authorities to ensure public health and safety is safeguarded. Of course, this was not widely accepted. The longer the lockdown regulations remained, more and more detractors mushroomed with riots ravaging major European cities like Paris and London with people protesting against lockdown regulations, particularly the banning of gatherings (Braith, 2021). Religious people were also part of these

protests citing how the banning of gathering disrupts a very important part of their lives that is also crucial for their mental health.

## **2.5 Churches in Africa and Health**

There is often a misconception that religion in Africa is a colonial phenomenon however religion actually predates colonialism (Wehrs. 2016). Unfortunately, in many instances where religion is being discussed with respect to Africa, it is difficult to erase the footprints of colonialism. With respect to the church in Africa, the involvement of the missionaries' dates back centuries. Many of the first hospitals built in Africa were built by missionaries (Okyere Manu-2014). The colonial administrations only intervened much later. In Malawi for instance, 70% of healthcare facilities in rural areas were built and belong to churches (Chin,2010). In Papua New Guinea, churches provided up to 50% of the countries health services and were very much well integrated (Mapira et al, 2011). Church pharmaceutical systems in Africa often depend on internationally reputable.

There is often a distrust between medical practitioners or health service providers and rural communities (Sequeira et al, 2020). Vaccination drives for instance are often met with a lot of distrust and skepticism and religious organizations in the continent are often the ones that help bridge the trust barrier (Smith, 2018). This is because most health infrastructure in Africa was first established by religious organizations. Of course, Africa is not a homogenous continent, and this has often been the mistake research Eurocentric academic discourse has made. The treatment of Africa as a homogenous continent. For instance, in South Africa, a lot of the health facilities that previously belonged to faith-based organizations have been nationalized and are now being run by the South African department of health (Cameron, 2011). Most of these were Christian Missionaries. In other African countries however, the picture is very different. In Mali for instance health facilities that are faith-based are few and far between. With that said, there has in recent times been a rise in Islamic faith-based organizations providing healthcare in over a dozen different countries in Africa (Aloitabi, 2011). These countries include Cameroon, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Tanzania and Lesotho. In these countries the faith-based market share is estimated to sit at over 30% (Widmer et al, 2011).

Faith-based healthcare providers in Africa are generally classified as private non-profit entities although their work generally benefits the public. They are more public than private in both ethos and practice in the sense that the work they do is somewhere in the middle. They often work to fill in gaps left by others whether it is designated public hospitals or private health facilities. One would say these faith-based health entities operate in the vacuum where both the public and private health facilities are unable to assist (Van Pletzen et al, 2014). The clearest example of this is found in the Democratic Republic of Congo where various faith-based organizations including churches work together to help run more than half of public health facilities which are struggling with various issues pertaining to resources.

Because most faith-based health organizations in Africa are non-profit, they are somewhat best placed to champion the health issues that are also controversial that involve issues of human rights, nutrition, immunization to infant mortality. Organizations that operate for profit may not necessarily pursue such issues as they might not exactly be the most profitable. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence when it comes to the influence of faith-based organizations in Africa in the health sector (Parsitau, 2011). The issue here is that there is a gap in that kind of research because whenever there is health research that includes religion, the discourse almost always veers towards HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health. This is of course important however religious organizations have contributed immensely to modern health and continue to be influential even today and it seems there is not enough focus on that. The scope that could be explored should be widened.

## **2.6 Churches in South Africa and Health**

South Africa can indeed be classified as a religious country. According to Statistics South Africa, over 80 percent of South Africans would describe themselves as religious. 75 percent of them consider themselves to be Christian. The extent at which these people are committed to their respective religions may vary however they do consider themselves religious in some shape or form and from this it is easy to imagine just how influential religions can be in shaping society. Health is an issue that affects all spheres of society be it socially, politically or economically and thus for this reason it is an issue that requires the attention of all sectors in society, and this includes the church (Erasmus et al, 2012).

There is a well-documented history of the intervention of the church whenever there has been a health crisis and a cause for action, faith-based organizations are often on the frontline in societies response. In the early 2000s, at the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu was one of the leading voices in raising awareness and advocating for the provision of ARVs to all that needed them (Tutu, 2002). He termed the pandemic as the new apartheid as it seemed there was somewhat of a causal link between poverty, ignorance, inequality and the virus. HIV/AIDS of course devastated the whole world however over time, a pattern developed, and it seemed where there was poverty and inequality, the virus thrived. This now made it more than just a health crisis but a socio-economic one and thus civil society organizations like the church sprang into action (Maurice, 2014).

Tutu's sentiments were surprisingly echoed by then South African department of health minister Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi who called and appealed for greater collaboration between faith-based organizations and other secular bodies in response to health issues in society. At the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, while there was huge stigma towards HIV/AIDS patients, it was often the work of faith-based organizations like churches and mosques that worked to take care of the ill by providing them with food, care and concern at a time where the whole world had misunderstood them and thus rejected them in fear. It was religious organizations that were at the forefront of seeing past the stigmas and continuing to care and treat HIV/AIDS patients to the end (Akintola, 2011).

The landscape of healthcare in the world tends to point to more of a socio-economic/political issue rather than just health. Diseases like Malaria, Tuberculosis, and Ebola all show greater prevalence in the less developed parts of the world which suggests that the issues may be more social (Bärnighausen et al, 2007). There also seems to be a rise of non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension cardio-vascular disease and cancer globally and it is happening at an alarming pace. This is true even in South Africa as tuberculosis for example is the leading killer in the country surpassing even aids and it is tragic that it is a disease that is preventable and curable that is the leading killer.

These are often diseases which are avoidable if people simply chose to lead healthier lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle includes eating habits, recreational and social habits and in a poverty-stricken country like South Africa where more than 50% of the country live below the poverty line it is

worth noting that living a healthy lifestyle may not necessarily be that simple (Davie, 2015). For this reason, the health department requires to take a more comprehensive approach to health which includes all sectors of society. The role of religious organizations like World Faiths Dialogue Developments thus become of paramount importance. Faith based organizations play a central role in healing, caring and in providing some of the most basic necessities in our lives. They also play a crucial role in spiritual and mental wellbeing which is also an important facet to health which may often be overlooked by some (Chowdhury, 2019).

In relation to faith-based organizations and how they can impact health, forming part of the sustainable development goals, the former health minister Dr. Motsoaledi suggested that religious organizations ought to be part of the conversation in supporting Universal healthcare. This is a campaign is about ensuring all people regardless of the individuals socio-economic standing. According to the 1978 World Health Organization Alma-Ata Declaration, health does not only imply the absence of disease, but it also speaks to one's good physical, mental and social wellbeing. These are three facets of health that should be looked at as part of the same whole as if there is an issue with social wellbeing, it will almost always feed into mental and physical wellbeing and that is a breeding ground for disease. The church in this area has a crucial role as it provides a very healthy and tranquil place for people to socialize, pray and this helps a great deal with their mental, social and physical wellbeing (Ellsworth,2010).

Faith-based organizations also form a great space for dialogue within communities. Thus, they form a great space to help challenge stigmas around diseases like HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis, Leprosy and albinism. The church is also one of the best spaces for people with chronic diseases that cannot be cured, it provides them to have love and care even in their last days so that they are able to make peace with their situation and perhaps delay the seemingly imminent death a little longer (Matimelo, 2007). Churches are also one of the best advocates for a healthy lifestyle within communities and the prevention of diseases is intricately linked to the kind of lifestyle people live. More people being conscious of the impact certain lifestyle choices will have on their health will help in preventing diseases (Wasserman, 2010). Simple things like exercise for good physical health, eating healthy and stopping bad habits like smoking and excessive consumption of alcohol play a crucial role in fostering good physical, mental and social health. Interpersonal violence is one of the leading problems in society with gender-based violence and rape being the most

alarming issue. South Africa is the GBV and rape capital of the world and there seems to be a causal link between this and alcohol abuse (Manzanga, 2019). It is not to say alcohol and other forms of substance abuse cause these crimes, but they do seem to be more prevalent in areas where alcohol and substance abuse is most prevalent, one might say there is a causality, perhaps the extent can be argued. Faith-based organizations are very effective in helping give a sense of control and influence on people's behavior and lifestyle choices without necessarily any coercive force. Religion offers a soft way in which leaders in society can influence people to take care of themselves (Heward- Mills et al, 2018).

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has posed a great challenge to the faith-based organizations in South Africa. During the pandemic, the churches were not exempted from criticism. Many extravagant churches in South Africa often have pastors showing great theatrics, demonstrating supernatural healing powers and many questioned where these healing powers are in the midst of the most devastating health crisis in recent memory. The South African Council of Churches however did not go in hiding in this regard. They provided leadership and encouraged churches to halt gatherings and consider conducting sermons virtually and prayers in private. This was in response to the risk large gatherings caused in the midst of a health crisis. They were largely successful in this regard as many churches including the ZCC, Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe) and many other churches halted their worshiping in large gatherings and put the safety of congregants first. Any health crises will always be a social problem as humans are social beings and therefore religious organizations can never be ignored in the response plan to any crisis in society as their influence can never be denied. Instead of attempting to curb this influence it instead ought to be harnessed and channeled towards shaping a better society (Mpfu, 2020).

## **2.7 Shembe Church: More Than a Church Theology of Shembe**

L.N Shembe, grandson to Isiah Shembe (founder of the church) and the third leader of the Shembe church strongly rejected the assertion that this was merely a Zulu version of Christianity and he argued that this was very much a religion in its own right. An African religion and although many scholars this agreed with Inkosi L.N Shembe, it is perhaps necessary to go back to some of the writings of his predecessors to get a proper grasp of why he might make this assertion (Hexham, 1996). It is necessary to first define what Christianity is before proceeding any further. Christianity can be defined as a faith that centers around the belief in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection

and that he is the doorway to heaven. Jesus is the savior and redeemer in Christianity, and it is difficult to imagine anyone with beliefs contrary to this claiming to be Christian (Heyward, 1999). For instance, it would be difficult to listen to anyone claiming that they are Muslim when they, in the same breath do not believe in the prophet Muhammad or indeed Allah. There are inconsistencies or contradictions which are difficult to reconcile. The extracts below were extracted directly from Izihlabelelo ZamaNazaretha with a translation. The hymns and their melodies were composed by Isiah Shembe from a source he described as his dreams John Dube describes these melodies as one of the most authentic Zulu sound he's ever heard. There are two hymns extracted, the first one is Isiah Shembe somewhat describing the essence of his being (Isihlabelelo 71) and the second one (Isihlabelelo 220) is a hymn which is reserved to be sang only on the days where the deaths of the church's leaders are being commemorated (Shembe, 1940).

Isihlabelelo 71:

*Ngithanda Zingakaqini Izintabo Ma.yKlowradpyhoaukahdaevewlaonvgeidgcmoebab.eNfogrwe  
umkouuqnatlaiknws estnodoledlafiryamak, hyo.u have anointed me eternally. I am th wakho  
wasendulo, ingakaqInaimimyiomuarnwgor.kNferommithaonmciebnotytiameasn,zbi  
einfogarekahmillpsosmtopoodzfii nrmgaamnadsdplari.ngs flowed rapidly.*

*mifula ingaka mpompozi ngamandla, uJehova wangidala ngaphambi kwendlela yakhe.*

*bikho, kukade sengizelwe.*

Jehovah had created me, before his ways. Before there was depth, I had already been born. Before he had created this heaven and this earth. Before the moon lit up this earth's skies. (Shembe, 1940) (Translation done by V. Shembe, 2020)

Isihlabelelo 220

1. *Yaze Yafika leyo mini enkulu eyesabekayo. Zafika izithunywa zilande uThumekile. Hamba Kahle Baba Wami oyingcwele.*

2. *Umhlaba Wamazama, Amazulu abikelana, izulu laduma lona. Kwesabeka! Kwesabeka! Iyemuka Inkosi!*

3. *Wena Muzi okhethiweyo wase Mikhayideni, Mawuhlobe Ngeziqhama, umsinele uSimakade. Uyi Nkosi Yamakhosi wena Mkhululi Wami.*

4. *Izintombi nezintsizwa zadabuka zikhala. Abafazi namadoda Baphelelwa yithemba. Nkulunkulu Nkosi yethu, usishiyela bani.*

5. *Nkosi yethu Simakade uphinde usikhumbule thina aboni abalusizi. Siwele ezandleni zakho. Khala ntombi, khala ntsizwa, khala nawe ntandane.*

1. *And so that momentous and dreaded noon hath arrived. The messengers had arrived to fetch Thumekile. Go well my holy father.*

2. *The earth trembled, as heavens informed each other and the heavens rumbled. It was frightening! It was Frightening!! As the Lord departs.*

3. *You the chosen home of Mkhayideni, decorate yourself with good deeds, and dance for Simakade. You are a King of Kings, you, my redeemer.*

4. *The maidens and young men were in despair as they wept. Women and men lost hope. God, our lord, for whom have forsaken us?*

5. *Our Lord Simakade, remember us again, we sorrowful sinners. May we fall into your hands! Lament oh maiden, Lament young men, you too orphan, lament.* (Translation done by V. Shembe, 2020) (Shembe, 1940).

The hymns above offer great insight into the nature of Shembe's theology, how he viewed himself and subsequently how Shembe followers view him. In one of the hymns, on Isihlabelelo 71 Shembe says in the first verse: "My Lord, you loved me before mountains stood firm, you have anointed me eternally, I am the beginning of your ways". In verse 3 and 4 Shembe goes on to say, "Before the river valleys flowed rapidly, Jehovah created me, before his ways, before there was depth, I had long been born, before he created this heaven along with this earth" (Shembe, 1940). There are many ways in which this can be interpreted however what is certain is that Shembe asserts that he is not merely a prophet, he is a being that has existed since the beginning of creation. What is clear here is that Shembe did not at all view himself as a mere prophet. When he says "Before river valleys flowed rapidly, Jehovah created me, before his ways, before there was depth, I had long been born, before he created this heaven along with this earth" he implies that he is a being that predates creation. It should not then come as any surprise when Shembe congregants do not recognize Jesus Christ as their lord and savior instead that position is reserved for Shembe.

Some of the many objections towards the claim that Shembe is a religion in its own right often cite the use of the bible and the adoption of some Christian customs within the church. However, many Christian customs themselves are not unique to Christianity, they do actually predate Christianity. Isiah Shembe, in an interview with the Native Economic Commission in 1932 the prophet Isiah Shembe states that his spiritual calling is free of any contact with Western Christianity. Isiah Shembe is quoted saying “I have not got [my teachings] from any European Church... I teach them what I myself feel inspired to teach them”. Shembe goes on to reiterate that he had received no European education either secular or religious. The use of the bible and some Christian customs seemed to be more an issue of convenience for Shembe rather than any conviction to Christian beliefs (Cabrita, 2014).

Isihlabelelo 71 of Shembe’s hymn book seems to quite clearly put Shembe amongst cosmic divine beings that existed before creation itself and this belief alone is enough to disqualify Shembe followers and Shembe himself as Christians. Isihlabelelo 220 in Shembe’s hymn book narrates Isiah Shembe’s final words and he is translated to say, “I was born eternally and eternally I shall be”. Shembe’s declaration that he is an eternal being is akin to declaring that he is a deity and indeed, within the Shembe congregation of Ekuphakameni, Shembe is viewed as a deity, a God whose spirit took on flesh and lived amongst men. The assertions by L.N Shembe, Isiah Shembe’s grandson that the Shembe church was not just a Zulu version of Christianity but a religion in its own right is thus supported by a deeper inspection of Shembe’s theology, how he viewed himself and how his followers in the present day view him. This is an important issue as the position of Shembe in the church also influences greatly how his followers are willing to adhere to his teachings.

## **2.8 Shembe Church Succession**

The writings of G.C Oosthuizen in his book *Succession Conflict in the Church of Nazarites*, Oosthuizen could be described as somewhat of wizard waving his magic wand to seduce the crowd into thinking that one thing is going on when in fact it may be something else entirely. The writings of Oosthuizen show signs his own theological agenda and interests seeping into his work as an academic researcher. L.N Shembe and A.K Shembe were both part of a long succession dispute after the death of J.G Shembe, father to L.N Shembe and older brother to A.K Shembe. L.N

Shembe submitted a response to an application by Michael Mtshali challenging his right to lead the church. L.N Shembe states that the Shembe church followed Zulu customs and traditions and thus viewing the succession issue through European lenses would be in direct contrast to the teachings of Isiah Shembe (Oosthuizen, 1981).

This is in contrast to the predictions made by Oosthuizen regarding the leadership of the church in the future which says “a new era has commenced in this Church. The leader will now merely be a leader whose authority will not be based on his own charismatic supernatural qualities but merely on his ability to mediate between the Church and the great fathers of his church namely Isiah and Johannes Galilee Shembe the organizational structure of the Church will gradually be lifted from the sacral and become more secularized and eventually more democratic. African traditional approach will gradually make way for the ecclesiastical traditional approach”- (Oosthuizen, 1981)”. Most of the writings in that era had a very familiar theme of critiquing Shembe with the main accusation being that Shembe moved from the more accepted Eurocentric forms of Christian worship and moving them to more Zulu forms of worship. Perhaps this critique emanated from a misunderstanding of Shembe’s theology who did not view himself or his work as that of a Christian Church.

Within the Shembe congregation Isiah Shembe is held in high esteem, many scholars believed that Shembe’s position usurped Jesus from his role as the central figure of the church. The predictions made by Oosthuizen may suggest that the concern raised by L.N Shembe of how viewing the church through European lenses instead of Zulu traditional lenses may be misleading. Oosthuizen may have merely been projecting his Eurocentric views of how large religious organizations ought to be run and thus missing this point entirely. This then makes the conflict to succeed J.G Shembe not just a political battle but a theological disagreement and a battle for the very soul of Isiah Shembe’s theology. On one side there are the assertions of Oosthuizen that the church is veering towards a more ecclesiastical traditional approach, which is a Eurocentric type and on the other side of the fence there is Inkosi L.N Shembe who asserts that the church is grounded on Zulu tradition and thus making him the rightful heir and successor to Inkosi J.G Shembe. Bishop A.K Shembe was the more ecclesiastical choice as he was the more democratic and commanded a larger following which culminated in a breakaway movement being formed. This movement, led by

Bishop A.K Shembe settled in Ebuhleni, moving away from the original headquarters at Ekuphakameni lead by L.N Shembe.

## **2.9 Shembe Teachings and their Relation to Health**

What we eat greatly influences our physical health and our social, economic and political interactions greatly influence our mental health and our general environment (Springman et al, 2016). In his hymn book Shembe wrote “Fear Jehovah, oh generations upon generations, and observe his laws which he, Jehovah, wrote through his Servant, Moses”. When put under scrutiny, a lot of Mosaic Laws in the bible have great health benefits when followed. Good or easy examples would be the laws against alcohol and smoking. These are all things which Shembe discourages, and it is well documented how these substances are bad for society. Alcohol for example is responsible for over 50% of road accidents in the country (Stats SA, 2017). Shembe encouraged his people to farm and produce their own food as organic food is healthier than genetically modified foods. In India, the expansion of organic farming was noticed after the 90s (Singh and Verma, 2013), encouraged by the organic farming produces which are of high quality comprising of vegetables and fruits without causing any damage to the environment.

### **2.9.1 Sexual Health**

A common theme in most religious movements is the encouraging of congregants to abstain from premarital sexual intercourse. The Shembe congregation is no different. This of course is a practice that has many health benefits for the individual and society in general. United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (2008) submitted that more than 17% of people living with HIV and AIDS are found in South Africa. It has been noted that in the past decades, the increase in HIV prevalence in South Africa has increased drastically (Department of Health, 2007). According to WHO (World Health Organization) and United Nations (2013) notify that the problem of teenage pregnancy is mostly witnessed in the developing countries, mostly African countries. Global estimates show that one out of five women give birth before the age 18 (Loaiz and Liang 2013 cited in Mjwara&Maharaj 2018). The spread of HIV/AIDS, teenage and unplanned pregnancies, all of these challenges are easily addressed for Shembe followers if they observe his teachings.

## 2.9.2 Recreational Health

This study will also look at the drinks people of Shembe are discouraged from drinking. They are prohibited from consuming alcohol as Mosaic Law in Numbers 6 illustrate that if one has taken a vow to be a Nazarene, he or she is discouraged from consuming alcohol. Apart from social challenges that alcoholics create in a society, alcohol causes some health problems such as “heart disease, exposure to fertility problems and male impotence” (Brazier, 2015). As most of churches prohibit followers from taking medicine, whether traditional or modern, Shembe followers are also discouraged from taking them. This means that Shembe followers are not encouraged to use contraceptives. Churches can play a significant role in guiding teenagers to not get involved in sexual intercourse as studies like the one by Mjwara (2014) suggests that, women encounter their first sexual intercourse as young as 13 years.

Shembe followers were instructed by Shembe to observe the Law of Moses as indicated above. One of the instructions that is also a Mosaic Law is that Shembe followers should not wear shoes, as a result they do not wear shoes even if they are walking 89km walk from Ekuphakameni to Mount Nhlankazi (Marinovich, 2018). As biomedical research suggest, inflammation is among the cause of the modern chronic illness. It is encouraged that people should practices what is known as earthing which is a natural method involves connecting the human body to the earth (Oschman, 2008). Shembe followers spend a month in a holy city of Ekuphakameni and shoes are prohibited in this place (Sithole, 2013).

In order to understand the Shembe church it is important that one understands its charismatic founder Isiah Shembe and his whole goal and vision. In particular, understanding the political epoch which was present when Isiah Shembe started his work in Natal. It was a few years after the Bhambatha rebellion of 1906, the last armed resistance lead by a traditional leader, after this the Zulu nation was well and truly defeated (Guy, J.2005) The colonial state went on to brutalize black people in all spheres of life. Economically, physically and indeed even psychologically. Frantz Fanon perfectly captures this phenomenon of the psychological damage that becomes with being a defeated people who are now stripped of all dignity and a sense of self-worth through the violence and dispossession they are subjected to. Colonial rule is entrenched and maintained through violence and repression. Fanon asserts that violence is the natural state of colonial rule. Colonialism ultimately dehumanizes the colonized. This of course has a lasting effect on the

psyche of the natives and how they relate to one another. The colonizer is the bringer of violence into the natives home according to Fanon (Bulhan H.A, 2004).

When Isiah Shembe emerged, around the years of 1906, the feeling of hopelessness, despair and defeat was almost palpable amongst the natives in Natal. Colonial rule had emphatically defeated the natives to the point where they had begun to question their self-worth, as if the only way for them to feel human again was assimilation and imitating the white colonizer. Everything that represented being black, their way of life, their ancestral land and even their belief systems were all demonized. Everything that was black was bad and everything that was white was good. Isiah Shembe preaching a gospel of a God with black skin, nappy hair who wore cowhide skin like them it was almost blasphemous. It was not the typical Gospel being preached. However, what was most striking about Shembe is that it was clear his gospel focused a lot on restoring the pride of the typical Zulu native in Natal. He spoke a lot on restoring the Zulu Monarchy to its former glory. In his hymns Shembe a lot of declarations that had political connotations about Zulu pride and Zulu nationalism, this often landed him in jail. Shembe's work on his followers that started more than a century ago is still helping in healing his people and not just physically but psychologically too.

### **2.9.3 Impact on Mental Health**

South Africa today is a society which has seen broken families normalized and this has had a knock-on effect on the moral decay within the society. Children who are born in broken homes have a much higher likelihood of developing mental disorders than kids born in a nucleus family. Many of the health problems that affect kids from broken homes can be traced back to mental health. One of the most serious yet underestimated mental health issue amongst black people is depression. Put a depressed young boy in a crime ridden, violent society where rape and Gender based violence is prevalent and you could potentially create a monster (Kynoch, Gary, 2008).

There are a lot of Shembe's teachings which when looked at in close proximity, one can deduce that they are good not only for the body, but for the mind and society in general. For one, Shembe strongly encourages young males to take a wife at an early age so that they do not impregnate a woman out of wedlock and start another cycle of a broken family. This ensures that Shembe congregants, should they follow his teachings correctly will have a better chance of having a healthy home where there is a present mother and father. Studies show that more than 80% of men

who rape grew up in fatherless households. The South African townships are populated with people who have many mental disorders which they themselves are not aware of because they have been somewhat normalized. The kind of rape and violent crimes found in Townships should not be viewed as normal and many solutions to these problems are found in Shembe's teaching.

Shembe in his morning prayers discourages people from asking for handouts and encourages them to work for everything that they have. This is something that instills self-worth and restores a person's sense of self-worth and dignity. The white man stripped the native of everything and the natives had become second class citizens in the land of their forefathers. Shembe encouraged his followers to do things that would make them self-sufficient. Women who were struggling to provide for themselves approached Shembe seeking counsel. They were considering being domestic workers, but Shembe advised against it saying that this would hinder their freedom and make them dependent on white people which is something Shembe vehemently preached against. Shembe instead said that they should profit from their own education and talent. He encouraged the women to make a living using their ability in arts and crafts making mats, baskets or whatever the women could make (Fernandez, James W,1973). These were sold to tourists at the Durban beachfront, a practice which still exists even today (Maharaj, Brijji, 2006). These teachings have made members of the Nazareth Baptist Church a very distinct people in Natal today who have their own functional micro economy and they live in fairly healthy communities, and this is all down to Isiah Shembe. These are all factors which contribute to a community where people are healthy physically and mentally. Shembe indeed addressed all these health issues through very simple teachings.

The devotees of the Shembe congregation today remain loyal and truly devoted to Shembe's teachings. The Shembe congregation today is estimated to be between 3 to 4 million strong. Although they may have been embroiled in leadership disputes, as an outsider looking in, you struggle to tell them apart because they all remain devoted to the cornerstone of Shembe's teachings. You still find a lot of them in the Durban Beachfront selling various traditional items and the annual pilgrimage to Nhlankakazi Mountain is still one of the most breathtaking religious spectacles Kwazulu-Natal has to offer. Shembe congregation has split into 4 main groups however they all seem to be devoted to his teachings save only 1 or 2 (Masondo,S 2004).

#### **2.9.4 Western Medicine and Diet**

Shembe discouraged the use of Western medicine amongst his followers and instead encouraged a strict diet with certain food and lifestyle habits being strongly discouraged. Things like the use of cooking oil, and salt and also encouraged fasting at least once a week (on the day of the Sabbath) These are few of many diet habits Shembe encourages as an alternative to medicine and drugs (Masondo,2004). The interesting thing to look at however is if there is any scientific study that supports what might sound ludicrous to many, especially in the medical profession. The truth is that while the use of medical drugs may have a desired effect in the short term, they also come with adverse side effects when used too frequently. Patrick Holford argued that eating nutritious foods like fish, olive oils, tomatoes and beans could quell and prevent heart attacks (Holford,2006). One of the main criticisms always levelled against Shembe's view on medicine and drugs is that it is impractical to encourage people to not use drugs at all. However, there is clear evidence that a proper healthy and balanced diet does not just cure but it prevents most ailments. For almost every disease, there is a behavioral, diet and lifestyle way in which it can be cured or avoided entirely. STDs, diabetes and many other deadly diseases are preventable by simply living and living with people with certain lifestyle choices.

The objection that nutritious eating is too expensive and not affordable might too expensive for people, therefore drugs are better is one that has been made by medical professionals. However, that cannot be used as a good enough objection as that is an indictment on societies economic systems and wealth distribution rather than Shembe's teachings. It is the capitalist society that would rather allow food to rot on shelves instead of giving it to the people who need it. The capitalist society is far behind it's supposed goal of the provision of cheap and affordable food for all. 25% of the world is overfed and 25% is hungry (Albritton,2009). That suggest there is a problem with the distribution of food resources, not the encouraging of healthy eating/dieting. The benefits of food even get into mental issues like depression. Mental health is dominated by therapist who then prescribe certain drugs as anti-depressants.

In 2004, over 3.5 million people received prescription for anti-depressants, these drugs cost over R1 trillion rand. Most of anti- depressant drugs contain monoamine oxidase enzyme. These drugs have side effects like causing extremely high blood pressure if taken with substances that contain

alcohol, caffeine or yeast (Burne,2009). On top of that, many anti-depressants are addictive. The God given nature often provides a lot more nurturing alternative. There are natural alternatives to anti-depressants, and they would cost governments a lot less to provide. These alternatives are found in food. The treatment of depression is based on a biochemical imbalance on the brain. Nutrition based treatment thus would be a viable safer alternative with little to no side effects. The only necessity would be finding out what kind of imbalance is in the patient's brain and then providing the patient with a diet that can supplement those nutrients (Audhya2004).

## **2.10 Poverty and Health**

One of the major causes of illness and barrier to access to needed health care is poverty. There is a causal link between one's financial status and the ability to live and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Poor people cannot afford the things needed to maintain good health and this includes adequate quantities of nutritious foods (Montgomery, 2009). In the event of an illness, poverty makes accessing healthcare timeously difficult if not impossible. Other factors that are related to poverty may include a lack of education and information on how to lead a healthy lifestyle and a lack of representation in the correct civil spaces to make public social services work for them. In the same breath, health care can also cause poverty because of the sheer expensive nature of proper healthcare is in countries like South Africa (Putri et al, 2021). There is often a considerable loss of income associated with poor health especially in developing countries. This may come in the form of a breadwinner being forced to stop working as a result of an illness and thus cuts off any income the family may have and thus plunges them further into poverty. The medical expenses force families to borrow at high interest rates, sell assets and drown in debt just to get medical attention (Nwosu et al, 2021).

Any health issue that does not account for the economic standing of the population will always miss a few points. Taking a look at South Africa and the picture of poverty, it is a very bleak one. Statistics South Africa uses poverty lines a way to measure poverty. The primary purpose of the national poverty lines is to provide a tool for the statistical measurement of money-metric poverty. The lines contain both food and non-food components of household consumption expenditure (Mdluli et al, 2021). Currently, StatsSA tracks three lines – the food poverty line, the lower-bound poverty line, and the upper-bound poverty line. The food poverty line is now R561 per person per

month. This refers to the amount of money that an individual will need to afford the minimum required daily energy intake. This is also commonly referred to as the “extreme” poverty line. The lower-bound poverty line is now R810 per person per month. This refers to the food poverty line plus the average amount derived from non-food items of households whose total expenditure is equal to the food poverty line.

The upper-bound poverty line is now R1,227 per person per month. This refers to the food poverty line plus the average amount derived from non-food items of households whose food expenditure is equal to the food poverty line. With the food poverty line sitting at R560 per person per month it becomes increasingly clear that many South Africans live on this line and many below it. According to the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group, about 30 million South Africans live below the upper bound poverty line of R1227 person in South Africa with a further 3 million living below the food poverty line of R560 (Deenon-Stevens et al, 2021). With the ongoing pandemic ravaging South Africa and many lost jobs or were unable to work due to the covid-19 restrictions resulting in many businesses downsizing staff or closing down permanently resulting in a blood bath of job losses (Posel et al, 2021). One of the responses to the crisis by the South African government was giving out an unemployment grant as one of the temporary measures to relief to the South African citizens. The grant however was below the food poverty line of and was just R350. This is obviously not enough to alleviate anyone even from food poverty and many have to also use this grant for other expenses that come with looking for employment including printing Resumes and commuting to job interviews (Bhorat et al, 2021).

This means that these funds are spread thin and many who rely on it as the sole source of income will find it impossible to satisfy nutritional needs. The buying habits of poor often has more to do with what is affordable rather than what is healthy. There is little choice in that regard and as the concern has more to do with affordability rather than health. What the poor view as most important is having enough to eat rather than having what is right to eat. If the food is palatable poor people hardly have the luxury of enquiring if it is healthy or not (Temple et al, 2021).

The logical conclusion to reach then is that any organization that seeks to speak to the wellbeing of people in terms of physical health has to have a programme that also seek to address socio-economic conditions of people. Health and poverty do not go hand in hand, where there is poverty, the health of the impoverished suffers. So, while lifestyle changes can go a long way in improving

people's health, the most holistic and long-lasting catalyst to improving a population's health is improving the socio-economic conditions in which the population resides in as poor socio-economic conditions are a breeding ground for bad health practices (Clark, 2009).

## **2.11 Shembe Church Socio-Economic Initiatives**

Isiah Shembe was a leader that above everything, showed great love for his people and that seeped into the teachings which he taught them. His teachings and initiatives with the Nazareth Baptist Church did not leave out speaking to the socio-economic circumstances of his people. In the 1920s a lot of women who were followers of Shembe and worked for white people mostly as domestic workers struggled to make ends meet. In seeking Shembe's counsel, he discouraged seeking out employment and being domestic workers to white families, citing how he thought this would be a handicap to their freedom. Shembe quite emphatically and vehemently preached against dependence on white people (Shange, 2013). Instead Shembe encouraged these women to use their own gifts and talents to profit from them. Shembe encouraged cultivating their handcraft skills making mats, baskets, beads or whatever it is that they could make using their hands, taking that and profiting from it. These goods were sold to tourists at the Durban beachfront, roadside markets and in rural areas and this still exists to this day (Shange, 2013). Isiah Shembe had amassed a lot of properties to the church's name and his son, J.G Shembe used a lot of those farms to create wealth for the Shembe community and many of the first spaza shops in rural areas in KwaZulu were often owned by the Shembe church but being run by members of the church thus creating employment and independence within the Shembe community. Shembe also encouraged a lot of farming and distributed the farms owned by the church to be run by members of the church (Browne, 2005).

The vision was to clearly build an independent self-sustaining community. This is an important factor as it becomes increasingly clear that Shembe's teachings were indeed a holistic approach that provided solutions for all spheres of life that may affect people's wellbeing (Browne, 2005). Of course, some of this was derailed when the leadership disputes ensued between different factions of the Shembe church. However, despite fragmentations, the economic potential of the Shembe church is still there for all to see as their strength in numbers over the years has increased to over 3 million and wherever they gather for their festivals it is always an economic boost for

locals. The annual pilgrimage to Nhlankakazi mountain sees thousands of Shembe congregants travelling on foot from Ekuphakameni in Inanda to Nhlankakazi mountain situated in Ndwedwe. Along the way there are mobile shops set up all over with drinks, food and accessories being sold and this is a great economic event (Hueser, 2008).

## **2.12 Conclusion**

The Nazareth Baptist Church or perhaps it would be more fitting to say the Shembe religion offers unique opportunity to study an emerging and developing religion. It would be disingenuous to dismiss the assertion that it is not a Christian Church but in fact a religion in its own right. It is only a century old and in comparison, to other religions like Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, this is a religion still in its infancy. This gives an opportunity to have perhaps one of the first religions to have all of its history documented in the modern era. There is a lot of academic work already done studying the Shembe religion but yet still there may be a lot more to be explored and studied. As this Chapter has shown, Shembe's theology demonstrates a clear contrast between Christianity. Isiah Shembe operated under a Christian state and thus it is impossible to imagine that Christianity did not in any way influence his work. However, influence does not imply sameness as Christianity itself is a religion that derives a lot from Judaism however it is Jesus Christ that sets apart Christians and Jews. In the same breath it is the belief in Isiah Shembe that sets apart AmaNazaretha from Christians and defines Shembeism as not merely a church but a religion in its own right. Religion has a way of helping influence and control people and it is important that this influence is harnessed to impact positively. Therefore, this study is important as any primary concern of any religion is the wellbeing physically, mentally and spiritually. What is also clear from the literature reviewed is how poverty and health can never be divorced from socio-economic circumstances. It is impossible to speak about a healthy community without addressing socio-economic issues as these things have a causal relationship. It is thus then worthwhile, embarking on this study. While it is just a study of one church or religion, it can be useful in many other aspects of promoting health and prosperity in other communities in the country using faith-based organization. The next Chapter looks at the research methodology used during the execution of this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In order to conduct precise research that is going to be impactful and worthwhile not just within the field of academia but also within the communities in general, it is imperative that the correct research methodology or approach is used (Lekamwasam, 2014). The following chapter outlines the research approaches and methods that were used to conduct the research while also outlining how the data collection was conducted. It also clearly outlines the verification process of the data to ensure validity and credibility of the data used for the research as well as how the data were analyzed.

This is a desktop qualitative study that looks at the enigmatic Shembe people of Ekuphakameni lead by V.V Shembe who is the great grandson of the great Prophet Isiah Shembe, the founder of the church and from whom the Shembe people derive their name (Heuser, 2005). The initial aim was to monitor their way of life especially when they gather together in large numbers like in the January Pilgrimage to Nhlankakazi Mountain and the July Festival held at Ekuphakameni which is their headquarters. There are other big gatherings in-between the held in May and October. In this study the aim was to assimilate into the congregation and observe them from within, watching in detail all their day-to-day practices. This would have given a unique and comprehensive perspective to the study. Aside from my own observations, there would have been frequent interactions with congregants where I converse with them about their practices in order to get the most organic and uncut responses from them.

Because of COVID-19, most of the research had to be done as a desktop study with the help of The Shembe Ekuphakameni Media which serves as a data base for recorded information for the organization. The site houses church sermons and interviews of various senior leaders. The research method which was employed was a secondary research or desktop research methodology. There is a considerable amount of content on Isiah Shembe and the Shembe Church ranging from books, articles, blogs and videos available on various platforms. This data, although unrefined, was most certainly useful for the purposes of this research. There are several interviews of Isiah Shembe and his successors, recorded oral history and other pieces of information which were of

great use in conducting this research. Ekuphakameni has in the past two decades embarked on a project of recording oral history from elders and collecting and storing all audio and video files in the archives found at Ekuphakameni. Information is cross referenced with other more academic and reliable sources to ensure authenticity where necessary.

### **3.2 Why Desktop Research?**

Secondary research is much more cost-effective than primary research, as it makes use of already existing data, unlike primary research where data is collected firsthand by organizations or businesses, or they can employ a third party to collect data on their behalf. There is also the issue of Covid-19 which makes human interactions complicated and thus any field research became a challenge, therefore, it was resorted to desktop research (Koo, 2016). These are the two key reasons why I resorted to undertake a desktop research.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

There are various secondary data collection methods which were employed, and these include:

- **Data available on the internet:** One of the most popular ways of collecting secondary data is using the internet. Data is readily available on the internet and can be downloaded at the click of a button. Data from the internet were also used in this study. This data is practically free of cost or one may have to pay a negligible amount to download the already existing data. Websites have a lot of information that businesses or organizations can use to suit their research needs. This is a research tool which we took advantage of. Information was cross referenced with other more academic and reliable sources to test authenticity where necessary. Data on the Shembe Church is also available on the internet.
- **Public libraries:** These were also a source of data for this study. Public libraries are another good source to search for data for secondary research. Public libraries have copies of important research that were conducted earlier. They are a storehouse of important information and documents from which information can be extracted. The services provided in these public libraries vary from one library to another. More often, libraries have a huge collection of government publications with market statistics, large collection of business directories and newsletters. I focused on information on churches for purposes of this study.

- Educational Institutions: Importance of collecting data from educational institutions for secondary research is often overlooked. However, more research is conducted in colleges and universities than any other business sector. The data that is collected by universities is mainly for primary research. However, businesses or organizations can approach educational institutions and request for data from them.
- Commercial information sources: These were also used in this study. Local newspapers, journals, magazines, radio and TV stations are a great source to obtain data for secondary research. These commercial information sources have first-hand information on economic developments, political agenda, market research, demographic segmentation and similar subjects. From these sources I collected maps, images, testimonies from Shembe devotees in journals amongst other useful information.

### **3.4 Validity, Reliability and Rigor**

Babbie and Mouton (2001) state that Trustworthiness has to do with credibility of the research or the study. They argue by illustrating that the level in which the peers respect the study is important and also to check if it really addresses the issues which intends to (Babbie & Mouton 2001). The research also makes use of what Babbie and Mouton (2001) refer it as referential adequacy. This is whereby the researcher used different materials with which to document findings. As the researcher is the member of the targeted population. All information was cross referenced with academic and reliable sources to protect the authenticity and integrity of the research. In this research, a clear reference list was submitted in order to leave a clear audit trail for supervisors and readers.

### **3.5 Data Collection and Validation**

Since this study seeks to interrogate the Theology of Shembe and the health benefits of its lifestyle, most of the data used was academically recognized data from books, journals and other academic sources. While historical information was used, it has been validated through academically recognized sources (Wong, 2021). There is a clear in text referencing and a reference list provided in order provide a clear paper trail. For the purposes of this research six key considerations were made when before accrediting data for usage in this research:

- Who collected the data (Is the source credible)?
- What is the data provider's purpose or goal (Is there any bias?)
- When was the data collected?
- How the data was collected
- What type of data was collected?
- Whether the data is consistent with data from other academically recognized sources.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Qualitative research in social sciences focuses on the study of human behaviour and of social life in natural setting (Terry, 2017). For analysing data that will be collected for this study, the researcher will use thematic analysis. Maree (2016) refers to qualitative data analysis as a process and procedures whereby researchers extract some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation from the qualitative data collected of the people and situations that they are investigating.

- Familiarization and Immersion- researcher will familiarize and immerse himself to the study. This will be achieved by thoroughly re-reading the raw data that will be collected.
- Inducing themes- researcher will induce themes on the data collected from interviews. This will be achieved by organizing and simplifying data which will ease the induction of themes.
- Coding themes- researcher will code data into a coding frame by allocating conceptual labels to fragments of data, and then identify themes within and across subjects' accounts.
- Elaboration- The purpose of elaboration is to capture the finer nuances of meaning not captured by your original, possibly quite crude, coding system. Researcher will provide more details about the themes that were collected.
- Interpreting and checking: In interpreting qualitative findings, the investigators should carefully consider their credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Therefore, the collected data will be interpreted against literature review, context and

subject positions, theoretical framework and the underlying assumptions that were initially proposed.

While being a Shembe devotee can be considered as a limitation to the study, in the process of analyzing the data it proved to be quite helpful. In terms of positionality, it was helpful in the sense that I was able to quickly recognize data that was inaccurate as a result of my lifelong devotion to Shembe (Otto,2015). The data was sorted into three main themes that all worked to compliment the purpose of the research. The first theme used to analyze data was from the point of view of Shembe's theology and teachings in order to get a grasp of the essence of Shembe. This was done so that the reader may be able to get a clear understanding of Shembe, his theology and teachings and how it ties into the research. For the second theme, data was analyzed from the perspective of science, namely the health sciences to try and find common ground between the teachings of Shembe and the health sciences. The final theme of analysis used was that of the general academic so as to establish a concise link between the data that has been researched and how it can be linked to the academic field of population studies (Otto, 2015).

### **3.7 Validity, Reliability and Rigor**

#### **Trustworthiness**

Babbie and Mouton (2001) suggest that trustworthiness determines how the research is treated by the peers in the same field and also illustrates if the research really addresses the questions the study is seeking to answer. Using data from multiple sources, called triangulation, was employed in this study to ensure trustworthiness.

### **3.8 Problems/Limitations**

The initial intention was of course to conduct a much more rigorous study whereby the Nazareth Baptist Church or Shembe religion was studied in great depth. This was going to be done through a lot of fieldwork which included interviews with various Shembe devotees, senior leaders of the congregation and general observations of the way of life of the average Shembe devotee through spending time in their worshipping sites, attending prayers, joining in on their pilgrimages and

other forms of worship. All this would have been feasible and made the research a lot richer than we have presented it. However, due to the outbreak of the global SARS-CoV-2 or Covid-19 global pandemic, this proved to be nearly impossible (Mpofu, 2020). The country has been under lockdown since March 2020 with no clear indication of when the pandemic or lockdowns would end and for this reason, we resorted to a desktop study. The limitations are quite clear at this stage, the only data that could have been used is secondary data and any data one might have been able to record through rigorous fieldwork was not at my disposal.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

Using this research method was very helpful and made conducting the study slightly simpler. The obvious draw back being that the study could not have been comprehensive as initially intended however I was still able to conduct a study that was worthwhile. The next chapter will present and analyze all the data which I found relevant to the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the data collected for the study, technique and instruments used to organize and analyze the data. The chapter also presents the findings from the desktop study.

For the purposes of this research, this study had the following research questions:

- Who is Isiah Shembe and the Nazareth Baptist Church?
- What are Shembe's teachings and how can they help with health?
- What assumptions are there regarding these teachings?
- What is the scientific evidence that supports these assumptions?

### **4.2 What is the Theology of Shembe?**

The study sought to describe who Isiah Shembe is and how the movement was established. The Shembe movement is most widely known as iBandla lamaNazaretha. The prophet Inkosi Isiah Shembe formally established the organization on 10 March 1910. After a vision around the 1900s from Mvelinqangi ordering him to leave his homeland in Ntabazwe and travel to Zululand and build this movement as we know it today (Sundkler, 1948). Sundkler in the groundbreaking *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* maintained that Shembe received his divine calling long before any encounter with the missionaries. The movement was largely centered around Zulu traditions with its headquarters situated in a property Shembe acquired in 1914 and named it Ekuphakameni. Over his lifetime acquired over 50 acres of land across Kwazulu-Natal in the form of 40 different properties, a majority of which were left to Ibandla lamaNazaretha. Ekuphakameni became the centre for AmaNazaretha, a Jerusalem like holy site (Mpanza, 1986).

### **4.3 Shembe's Lifestyle Teachings and their Health Benefits**

In his only official writing, the hymn book titled *Izihlabelelo ZamaNazaretha*, Isiah Shembe writes morning prayers, afternoon prayers and over 200 hymns (Muller, 2005). It is in these hymns that one gets a sense of just how much Isiah Shembe concerned himself with the wellbeing of his

followers. A permanent fixture in his writings is the word “ukuphila” which can be translated to mean health or wellbeing (Muller, 2005). His Holiness Prophet Isaiah had many lifestyle teachings that have since been an anchor of the Nazareth Baptist Church. These teachings range from physical, behavioral and nutritional and to a certain extent even medicinal. These teachings practiced by the multitudes of Nazarenes of Shembe are hugely beneficial and this can be seen by just mere examination of the congregants. This section will briefly look at some of these teachings and then highlight some of their health benefits.

#### **4.3.1 Physical and Behavioral Teachings: Mgidi**

The first of these teachings can be seen in the Umgidi which a combination of dance, music and spiritual worship. Apart from the pilgrimage to the holy mountain of Nhlankakazi, this is one of the most important events of the people of Ekuphakameni. Multitudes of congregants descend on the churches headquarters in Ekuphakameni in Inanda to attend Umgidi under the spiritual stewardship of His Holiness V.V Shembe (iNcoyincoyi). Umgidi is held almost every weekend on Sundays and congregants as per the teachings of Mqaliwendlela, His Holiness Prophet Isaiah Shembe (Heuser, 2008).

According to a study conducted by the World Health Organization in the year 2019, there is extensive evidence of how robust the impact of arts is on both mental and physical health (Douka, 2019). Arts helps greatly in providing multisectoral, holistic and integrated care that is centred around people and is able to address complex problems which few available healthcare solutions provide. A study in the United Kingdom which included over 48 000 people over the age of 40 found that dancing significantly reduces the odds of dying from a heart disease. The study spanned over 10 years and found that moderate-intensity dancing was linked with a lower risk of cardiovascular death. Moderate-intense, it is difficult to find a better description for Umgidi, the dance that AmaNazaretha partake in during their regular festivals throughout the year across Kwazulu-Natal (Løkken et al, 2021).

#### **4.3.2 Description of Shembe Dance**

The Shembe dance is a very graceful and elegant Nguni type dance that starts with slow paced upward and downward movement of the arms and feet. The movement of the arms and feet are in

a synced downwards and upwards motions that is informed by the rhythm and beat of the drums and the sound of the trumpet called Imbomu. As the pace of imbomu and the drums picks up, so too does the pace of the hands and feet and this is done until a high intense pace is reached, the dance climaxes and then it settles down again and the pace slows down again, this is done again and again until the dance ends (Pappini, 2004). It is a breath-taking Jazz like sound that is unique, one that can be described as one of the most authentic Zulu sounds. Dancers generally have accessories that are carried by Zulu warriors like a shield and because Shembe was a peace-loving man of God, in the place of a spear they carry umbrellas or the tail of a cow. What the dance does to the body can be compared to moderate cardio exercises (Nxumalo, 2015).

#### **4.4 The Health Benefits of the Shembe Dance**

##### **4.4.1 Weight Loss**

One of the reasons people adopt cardio exercise routines is because of how efficient it is when people want to lose weight. The Shembe dance, like cardio offers a great exercise for those looking to slim because it helps a lot when it comes to burning fat and losing calories. Of course, one's diet becomes very instrumental in weight loss but cardio like exercises enhances this as one session can burn hundreds of calories and the Shembe dance is a cardio like dance (Kumar et al, 2019).

##### **4.4.2 Healthier Heart**

Cardiovascular exercises relate to heart and blood cells and thus these types of exercises strengthen your heart. The Shembe dance is able to get the heart racing and pumping blood properly and since the heart itself is a muscle, this strengthens the heart. The heart being arguably one of the most important organs in the human body, this is great for a person's health (Alpert, 2011).

##### **4.4.3 Reduces Risk of Disease**

About 50 000 people suffer from heart attacks every year in South Africa and from this number, 25% of them die instantly. Cardio like exercises helps reduce the risk of heart attacks and many other diseases. This is because it reduces things like high blood pressure and cholesterol. Many

people who suffer from disease like diabetes and cancer would benefit from partaking in Umgidi which is a physical activity that can help reduce risk of these diseases (Koch et al, 2014).

#### **4.4.4 Energy Boost**

Many people in the modern world depend heavily on drinks that are high on caffeine as a result of a lack of energy. This is not a healthy habit and may come with more health issues. Umgidi being a type of cardio exercise offers a much healthier alternative as when the body goes through cardio exercise, it releases endorphins and these endorphins can be an energy boost for the body throughout the day (Grasser et al, 2014).

#### **4.4.5 Good for Mental Health**

Since cardio exercise releases endorphins, another benefit is that it simply makes you feel good afterward. Umgidi is a healthy way to combat mental health issues like depression, anxiety, or stress. Many people have coined the feeling one experiences after physical conditioning as a “runners high.” Aside from the endorphins, as you are taking part in umgidi, you are challenging yourself mentally. There are bound to be many times throughout your dance when you feel like you may quit. Pushing through an intense umgidi session and eventually finishing gives you a great sense of accomplishment and leads to a natural “high” you may feel afterward. When you get into the routine of Umgidi, you will start to feel better about yourself overall and improve your confidence (Fava et al, 2019).

#### **4.4.6 Good for Better Sleep**

Many professionals recommend you get at least seven to eight hours of sleep per night; however, a lot of people do not accomplish this. This results in low energy that can make the day a huge pain to get through. For many, good sleep is difficult to come by simply because it’s hard to fall asleep. When you add cardio to your lifestyle and umgidi being a type of cardio you will begin to experience a higher quality of sleep. With Umgidi as part of your day, you’re sure to feel tired come the evening, which is right before going to bed. In turn, this will make it far easier to get in bed and fall asleep at a reasonable hour (Mustian, 2013)

#### **4.4.7 Strengthens Immune System**

We generally all would like to avoid illnesses as they are unpleasant and often come with some kind of financial loss either through missing work or medical bills. Illnesses often occur at the most inconvenient times. The good thing is that most illnesses are avoidable with just better lifestyle choices. Cardio like exercises help the immune system deal with bacterial infections you may be vulnerable to because it changes your antibodies and white blood cells. Regular participation in umgidi and the white blood cells or antibodies move faster in your body to find and deal with potential illnesses (Chastin et al, 2021).

One session of Umgidi generally lasts between 15-25 minutes and this done at least once a week will come with all these benefits. It is also helpful that Umgidi is very fun and exhilarating so you are never bored when participating in the dance. The intensity of Umgidi varies with gender and age group with the young men having much more fast paced and intense dance routines. The main point is that we are not meant to sit around all day—we need to keep our bodies active and moving. In Umgidi, Shembe provides one of the best ways to remain fit and treat your body as a temple.

#### **4.5 Nutritional Teachings**

The second of these teachings is about food consumption in particular salt and oil/fat. This is one of the most important teachings of Shembe which has huge nutritional benefits. These teachings guide how the Nazarene people of Shembe approach food preparation and consumption. This teaching is anchored in organic living which guides how Shembe approached most aspects of human lives. It can well be argued with merits that through Shembe's teachings the Nazarene people have lived organic lives before it became a mainstream promoted way of life (Martin,2014).

##### **4.5.1 Oil Free Diet**

Isiah Shembe strongly discouraged the use of oil to cook foods and instead encouraged organic foods. In his morning prayer found in Izihlabelelo ZamaNazaretha Shembe states that “Ekupheleni kwalomthandazo, thabatha igeja ulime”. This can be translated to mean “at the end of this prayer, take your plow and go work your field” (Shembe, 1940). There is various interpretation as to what

Shembe was alluding to here but AmaNazaretha agree that one of the interpretations are that Shembe intended AmaNazaretha to eat healthily and avoid unhealthy food habits like the use of cooking oil. Oily foods often cause an intense reaction from your body and brain that can induce the addictive qualities of the foods (Silva, 2016). The food prepared using cooking oil in many cases gives great taste and pleasure however what follows after a high fat meal is far from good:

- Endothelial function diminishes for several hours, leading to decreased blood flow.
- Digestion slows as enzymes, stomach acid, bile, and other juices work to break down the fats.
- Excess fats are converted into triglycerides and cholesterol in the liver and stored in the body as a future source of fuel.

Consuming oil also has a negative effect on gut bacteria. Saturated fats appear to have the greatest impact on the number, richness, and diversity of bacteria in the gut microbiome which may be associated with reduced production of beneficial short-chain fatty acids and can lead to an increase in inflammation and free radical production (Patrone et al, 2018). This may result in DNA damage and deplete your body's stores of antioxidants as your system tries to combat the onslaught.

#### **4.5.2 About Healthy Oils**

Of course, there are almost always some benefits, no foods are completely useless. Some oils are less damaging than others. Oils containing more anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids may be less damaging than those with a lot of pro-inflammatory omega-6 fats, high saturated fat content, or trans fats, but some data shows all oils impair endothelial function to various degrees. Although there are some health benefits that come with the use of oil, they do not outweigh the harms, moreover especially because there are healthier alternatives (Ward et al, 2005).

#### **4.5.3 Getting Fat from Healthy Sources**

According to the World Health Organization, you do need some fat in your diet to help absorb fat-soluble nutrients and maintain cellular health, but it's not nearly as much as most people are consuming. The whole food, plant-based lifestyle keeps fat intake between 10% and 15%; some recommendations suggest higher amounts may be safe when consuming mostly unsaturated fats.

Total fat needs may differ depending on age, activity level, and health status (Tindall, 2020). Despite no formal education, many old Nguni men understood the importance of a proper diet and what is good and what is not good for the body and Inkosi Isiah Shembe perhaps fits this description quite well. It comes as no surprise then that he encouraged his followers to be farmers and have their own gardens and this can only be because he saw the value.

Here are some tasty ways to get healthy plant-based fats without added oil:

- Nuts, seeds, and their butters (look for brands with no added oil, sugar, or salt),
- Avocados,
- Beans like chickpeas and pinto beans, and
- Whole or fermented soy products.

#### **4.5.4 Salt Free Diet**

Salt or salty foods are characterized by having large quantities of sodium. While there is no arguing the fact that sodium is an essential nutrient necessary to maintain our general health, we need very little of it for our bodies to function properly. Consuming large amounts of sodium results in an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases and many other diseases. Therefore, a salt-free diet is much healthier than any meal plan that contains this element, as we can obtain a healthy amount of sodium from other food sources (World Health Organization, 2019).

Shembe made a lot of laws for his people without necessarily spending time to explain to them why this was good for them. Perhaps this is due to the magnitude of the organization he was trying to build; some details were not qualified as thoroughly as necessary. Salt contains sodium and it is not in contestation that it is necessary for our general health however we need very little of it for our bodies to function properly (Anderson et al, 2010). Furthermore, there are healthier foods one could consume that also contain the sodium found in salt and these include:

Fruits Names	Potassium, K	Sodium, Na
	Mg	Mg
Apple	107	1
Apricot	259	1
Avocado	485	7
Banana	358	1
Blackberry	162	1
Cantaloupe (wedge)	267	16
Cherry	222	0
Custard apple	382	4
Dates	696	1

Table 1: Healthier Foods. Source: (Lester, 1997)

**4.5.5 Benefits of Cutting Down on Salt**

The most important benefits of this diet are:

- Normalized blood pressure.
- Cutting down your salt consumption rate is essential if you suffer from hypertension. An excess of sodium makes your blood pressure skyrocket, which contributes to the risk of stroke.
- More efficient weight loss.
- Salt makes your body retain water, which increases your weight and makes it more difficult to get rid of extra pounds. A well-balanced diet with no salt, combined with an efficient exercise program, will help you lose weight faster.
- Improved kidney health.

Studies indicate that excessive consumption of salt increases the incidence of kidney disease (World Health Organization, 2019).

## **4.6 Behavioral Teachings**

The third of Shembe's teachings is abstinence from sex before marriage. Celibacy guides the sexual life of all unmarried congregants. There are many benefits to this in a country like South Africa which is already wallowing in high number of HIV and STD infections and a growing number of teenage pregnancies the HIV/AIDS Prevalence rate in South Africa is 18.90% which is the 4th in the world. All the top 5 countries are in the SADC region. Young women in South Africa are at great risk of being infected with HIV. In 2005, HIV infection prevalence in the age group 15-24 years was 16.9% in women and 4.4% in men (Muula, 2008). Shembe teaching young men and women to abstain from sex until they are married is one such teaching that would assist in reducing new infections amongst adolescents. Though this teaching carries a lot socio- economic benefits it can be seen that it also carries a lot of health benefits. The health benefits are to be elaborated upon in the second part of this section.

### **4.6.1 Benefits of Abstinence from Pre-Marital Sex**

One of the major social issues South Africa faces is teenage pregnancy. According to the South African department of health, over 36 000 babies delivered in the first quarter of 2021 were mothered by children aged between the ages of 10 and 19 (Naidoo, 2021). This is a major crisis, an issue of national importance for many reasons. If Children at the tender age of just 10 are getting pregnant, these are all possible rape cases, which means there's a rape crisis in the country. A study conducted in the United States of America between 1994 and 2003 showed that abstinence contributed to teenage pregnancy and unwanted pregnancies declining by 24%. A study conducted in 2001 by the Center for Disease Control found that abstinence 53% of the decline in pregnancy amongst 15–19-year-old girls could be attributed to abstinence (Kim, 2010).

#### **4.6.1.1 Ugandan Case Study**

In Uganda, HIV/AIDS reached epidemic levels during the 1980s. However, the prevalence of HIV started to decline through the 1990s and between 1991 and 2000, HIV infection declined from 21 percent to just 6 percent in that period. This success was largely attributed to a campaign by the Ugandan government encouraging monogamy and abstinence from sexual intercourse before

marriage (Parkhurst, 2011). The Ugandan President Museveni championed a mass education campaign promoting a three- pronged AIDS prevention message namely abstinence from sex until marriage, monogamous marriages and the use of condoms as the last resort. This campaign became known as the ABC campaign which is to mean Abstain, Be Faith and use a Condom if A and B fail (Stammers, 2005).

The Ugandan government lobbied various sectors to spread this HIV/AIDS prevention message. The Ugandan government developed strong ties community and religious leaders who were influential at grassroot level to teach this message. Furthermore, this was made part of the national school curriculum in Uganda to spread the message wider. Close relations with faith- based communities which included Christians, Muslims and Jews helped with training community workers with the ABC (Parik, 2007). There was also an aggressive media campaign launched by the government through television, radio and print media (Cohen, 2007). Several studies in Uganda show that the decline in HIV/AIDS prevalence came about as a result of the success of the ABC campaign. According to Dr Edward Green, an anthropologist at Harvard University and an expert on Uganda's AIDS programs, fidelity to one's partner was the most important factor in Uganda's success, followed by abstinence. A 2004 Science study concluded that abstinence among young people and monogamy, rather than condom use, contributed to the decline of AIDS in Uganda.



Figure 1: One of the Billboards put up for the ABC Campaign

The success of the ABC campaign in Uganda is evidence enough that abstinence from sex until marriage does not only have benefits at an individual level but society as a whole benefit when young people act responsibly with their sex life. These are the campaigns in line with the teachings of the Shembe Church.

#### **4.6.2 Socio Economic Benefits of Abstinence from Pre-Marital Sex**

Pregnancies are expensive and that is reason enough for children to not engage in activities that may result in a pregnancy. The medical costs of a pregnancy with the right type of attention could rise up to R40 000 from conception to birth (Chola et al, 2015). These are just medical costs and there are several other costs like food and transport that come with being pregnant. This is not a responsibility that should be fall children. It is in the children's best to avoid pregnancies to avoid having to take up these responsibilities that are in no way ready to take up.

The repercussions of teenage pregnancies often affect girls more than they do boys. The physical and emotional stress along with the stigma that comes with being pregnant while still in school often has adverse physical and emotional effects on pregnant girls. According to UNESCO, the global dropout rate for pregnant schoolgirls is as high as 70 percent. This dropout rate can largely be attributed to the reasons mentioned above. The physical and emotional stress of pregnancy is not something that should be burdening a child and thus, again, it is in their best interest to abstain from sex that may result in pregnancy as they lack the physical, emotional and even economic means to handle a pregnancy (Panday, 2009).

#### **4.6.3 Impact on Society**

For the 2019/20 financial year, national treasury had a budget of R567 billion for social grants. These grants include social grants and with the increased rates of poverty this budget is unlikely to decrease. The state's fiscal is under strain and funds which the state could use for other sectors like health or education have to be redirected to fund social grants and teenage pregnancy plays a significant role in increasing the number of children dependent on social grants. Many teenage mothers often have no financial support from fathers as in most cases they are also children who lack the financial means to be a providing father. This continues the poverty cycle within poor communities. Furthermore, more children will be raised in broken homes without father figures

and growing up in dysfunctional families is one of the leading cause of children falling into depression. Mental illnesses like depression and anxiety often lead to substance abuse at an early age and these lead to an increase in the crime rate. Teenage pregnancy overall has very little positives to offer society (Macleod, 2002).

#### **4.6.4 Shembe Teachings for Young Girls and Boys**

The message of abstinence of often drummed into girls and boys are often ignored. In the Zulu nation for instance, there is the famous reed dance for virgin maidens that encourages Zulu maidens to remain virgins and abstain from sex until marriage. There is very little done however for boys it is almost as if girls impregnate themselves. The Shembe Church has a more holistic approach to raising children with the same values and beliefs, boys and girls. Dating is entirely forbidden within the community as it is viewed as temptation that may lead to pre-marital intercourse. At Ekuphakameni, Inkosi L.N Shembe established a sabbath school which the young people in the Shembe church attend instead of the normal sermons attended by the adults. This operates as somewhat of an academy that teaches what it means to be a Shembe follower. Inkosi L.N Shembe also recommended that even the new converts first started with attending this Sabbath school before attending normal Shembe sermons as that is where being a Shembe follower is taught thoroughly (Hexham, 1996).

In the vicinity of Ekuphakameni there is profound discipline rarely seen in the modern day. Young girls and boys even sit separately in the classes, they are forbidden even from interacting within the premises of Ekuphakameni. The prospect of marriage is something that is very much encouraged (Shange,2013). It is something that is viewed as part of the journey to becoming a man, as part of coming off age. The issue of pre-marital sex is as serious to boys as it is to girls and thus the teachings are not one sided focusing only on girls as it really does take two.

#### **4.6.5 Shembe Arranged Marriages**

The Shembe church strongly encourages marriage and having proper family structures. The marriage process is one which involves the whole family from the moment it is initiated to the wedding day. When a boy feels he is ready to take a wife, he informs his parents, and then they journey to Ekuphakameni normally during the January or July festival or Umhlangano as it is

known to AmaNazaretha. At the end of the Umhlangano, the boy's father informs the leader of the Inhlalisuthi that his son wishes to take a wife and hands a letter with the details of the girl he wishes to have her hand in marriage. The letter is submitted to Inkosi (leader of the church) and it is he who gives authority for the request to go ahead. Once that authority is granted, the leader of Inhlalisuthi then goes to the leader of Amakhosazane or maidens and informs her that someone wishes to have one of the maidens' hands in marriage. That maiden is called forward and if she accepts the request for her hand in marriage, she does so by stretching out her hand and allowing the man to shake her hand (Shange,2013). That is regarded as an official and public engagement.

Gifts are then sent to the girl's family as a gesture and then the process of ukulobola is initiated. So, while it is an arranged marriage, it is not arranged in the sense that parents force their children to marry people they do not want to marry however there is a lot of social pressure to get married. The marriages do not occur under more conventional circumstances where the couple first dates before they marry. In fact, even after they are engaged, they are only allowed to come together once they have been officially married and anything else prior to that is prohibited. Figures 2 and 3 below show Shembe maidens and unmarried Shembe men wearing their Umgidi attire.



Figure 2: Shembe Maidens in their Umgidi attire on Nhlankazi Mountain, January 2019



Figure 3: Unmarried Young Shembe Men in their Umgidi attire at Ekuphakameni, July 2020

#### **4.7 Consumption of Alcohol and Cigarettes**

The fourth teaching is on the non-consumption of alcohol and non-smoking of cigarettes and drugs in general. Shembe's teaching of a sober spiritual life to his congregants has been an anchoring teaching that has been an anchor to Nazarene people of Ekuphakameni. South Africa is a very violent country with high statistics of violent crimes and other social ills. According to the business Tech, most violent crimes in South Africa occur between 18:00 on Saturday and 09:00 on Sundays (Businesstech,2019). This coincides with the period in the week whereby. South Africa sees a lot of road accidents of whom majority are fatal. Most of the incidents are linking to the high prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse. The figure 4 below illustrates the rate of road accidents for various countries in 2015. South Africa is at the top with 58% of road accidents being linked to drunk driving.

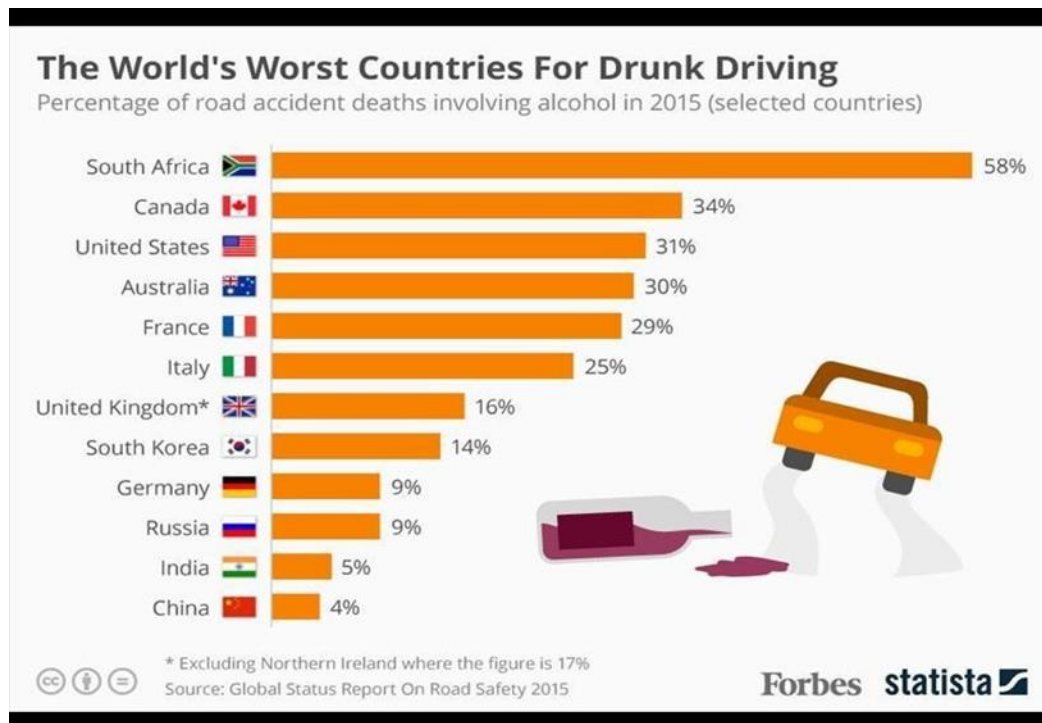


Figure 4: Drunk driving fatalities in SA and other selected countries (Makgoo, 2016)

#### 4.7.1 Negative Effects of Alcohol on Physical Health

Apart from the social issues that come with the use of alcohol, it is also not healthy for the human body. Alcohol is a toxin, and it's your liver's job to flush it out of your body. But your liver may not be able to keep up if you drink too much too fast. Alcohol can kill liver cells, and lead to scarring called cirrhosis. Long-term heavy use of alcohol also may give you alcoholic fatty liver disease, a sign that your liver doesn't work as well as it should (Livingstone, 2010). You may know about the dangers of blood clots and high levels of fats and cholesterol in your body. Alcohol makes both things more likely. Studies of heavy drinkers also show that they are more likely to have trouble pumping blood to their heart and may have a higher chance of dying from heart disease (Zakhari, 1997).

Alcohol is also known to cause a condition called anemia. This is when your body does not make enough healthy red blood cells to move oxygen around. That may give you ulcers, inflammation, and other problems. Too much booze may also make you more likely to skip meals, which can short-change your body of iron. There is a clear link between heavy alcohol use and many types

of cancers. Alcohol can damage the cells in your mouth, throat, voice box, and esophagus. It can lead to cancers in your liver, breast, and intestines. Alcohol can help cancer-causing chemicals in tobacco and other sources enter your cells more easily (Goldhaber, 2002).

#### **4.7.2 Effects of Smoking on Health**

Smoking is another habit which Isiah Shembe prohibits. The health risks associated with smoking are quite well documented. Smokers are at greater risk for diseases that affect the heart and blood vessels (cardiovascular disease). Smoking causes stroke and coronary heart disease, which are among the leading causes of death in the United States. Even people who smoke fewer than five cigarettes a day can have early signs of cardiovascular disease. Smoking damages blood vessels and can make them thicken and grow narrower. This makes your heartbeat faster and your blood pressure go up. Clots can also form (Shah,2010).

A stroke occurs when:

- A clot blocks the blood flow to part of your brain.
- A blood vessel in or around your brain bursts.
- Blockages caused by smoking can also reduce blood flow to your legs and skin.

Smoking can cause lung disease by damaging your airways and the small air sacs (alveoli) found in your lungs. Lung diseases caused by smoking include COPD, which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Cigarette smoking causes most cases of lung cancer. If you have asthma, tobacco smoke can trigger an attack or make an attack worse. Smokers are 12 to 13 times more likely to die from COPD than nonsmokers (Nicholas et al. 2021).

Smoking can cause cancer almost anywhere in your body:

- Bladder
- Blood (acute myeloid leukemia)
- Cervix
- Colon and rectum (colorectal)
- Esophagus
- Kidney and ureter

- Larynx
- Liver
- Oropharynx (includes parts of the throat, tongue, soft palate, and the tonsils)
- Pancreas
- Stomach
- Trachea, bronchus, and lung

Smoking harms nearly every organ of the body and affects a person's overall health. Smoking can make it harder for a woman to become pregnant. It can also affect her baby's health before and after birth. Smoking increases risks for:

- Preterm (early) delivery
- Stillbirth (death of the baby before birth)
- Low birth weight
- Sudden infant death syndrome (known as SIDS or crib death)
- Ectopic pregnancy
- Orofacial clefts in infants

Smoking can also affect men's sperm, which can reduce fertility and also increase risks for birth defects and miscarriage and bone health.

- Women past childbearing years who smoke have weaker bones than women who never smoked. They are also at greater risk for broken bones.
- Smoking affects the health of your teeth and gums and can cause tooth loss.
- Smoking can increase your risk for cataracts (clouding of the eye's lens that makes it hard for you to see). It can also cause age-related macular degeneration (AMD). AMD is damage to a small spot near the center of the retina, the part of the eye needed for central vision.
- Smoking is a cause of type 2 diabetes mellitus and can make it harder to control. The risk of developing diabetes is 30–40% higher for active smokers than non-smokers.
- Smoking causes general adverse effects on the body, including inflammation and decreased immune function.
- Smoking is a cause of rheumatoid arthritis (Peppone, 2011).

## **4.8 Medicinal and Healing Teachings by Shembe**

In the fifth and last teaching of Shembe for the purpose of this review we look at the use of western conventional medicines which Shembe's teaches against. It has previously mentioned that Shembe's teachings are anchored in organic living. Even in the healing of ailments, Shembe teaches his followers the use of natural herbs as instruments of healing (Dube, 1936). The socio-political impacts of western colonization of Africa means fields like medicine were in the past used as a tool of war against Africans and Shembe being alive to this preached against being treated through Western ways.

### **4.8.1 Why Shembe Distrusted Western Medicine?**

Inkosi Isiah Shembe operated under a colonial state and one which he had a deep distrust for. Wherever it was possible, Shembe discouraged his followers from turning to white people for help and encouraged independence. Shembe's distrust of whites even extended to white medicine, even with vaccines, he warned his people against being vaccinated by white questioning what it is that they are being injected with. In response to this distrust Isiah Shembe had to offer his people a viable alternative and his alternative was a healthy lifestyle that limited or prevented disease (Hexham. 1996). However, it is not that Shembe was entirely against medicine, it is that he did not trust those administering it, he did not trust that whites would always act in the best interest of black people. He ensured that his sons were educated because he wanted them to carry on his work and do the things that he perhaps could not because of his lack of formal education. His son Inkosi J.G Shembe was given the role of leading the church and his son A.K Shembe was named Inyangayezulu which can be translated to mean the heavenly Dr. He left a plot of land nearby Ekuphakameni and instructed him to build a hospital, a hospital that would treat AmaNazaretha.

Of course, this is never happened for various reasons and after the death of Inkosi J.G Shembe and the splitting of the church, the vision Isiah Shembe had for his people was derailed. However, the founder himself wanted to build a self-reliant people with their own businesses and health infrastructure and maybe had his children done as he had instructed this would have very much been possible (Cabrita, 2014).

#### 4.8.2 Health Benefits

Though many may see the teachings of Shembe as merely spiritual and religious, but these teachings do carry a lot of health benefits. Of course, no one can ignore the benefits that come from dedication and devotion to the teachings of your spiritual leader. For the purpose of this review, I shall focus on the physical health benefits. Even though these teachings if adhered to even provide mental health benefits. For many, Umgidi is just about spiritual worship. The amount of physical movement done as congregants dance, sing and some play instruments like imbomu and isigubhu (Nguni Trumpets and drums) which are very strenuous physically, it is a source of great physical activity. Umgidi being done every weekend means this is guaranteed physical exercise for at least one day a week. Now it is well documented that physical exercise does not only help with keeping one in good physical shape but also helps with preventions of diseases and keeping one mental fit. Physical exercise helps with maintaining weight, reduces risks of heart attacks. It also helps will lower blood pressure and strengthening of bones muscles and joints and lower risk of osteoporosis.

Not consuming salt and fats helps with lowering cholesterol and chances of getting heart attacks and other heart related diseases. These habits also help with lowering blood pressure levels which helps greatly in increasing a person's life expectancy. Furthermore, lowering salt intake or stopping consumption can help with prevention of hypertension and other related diseases (Freis:1976). Hypertension is a condition in which the force of the blood against the artery walls is too high. Usually, hypertension is defined as blood pressure above 140/90, and is considered severe if the pressure is above 180/120(Staessen,2003) High blood pressure often has no symptoms (American Heart Association,2017). Over time, if untreated, it can cause health conditions, such as heart disease and stroke. Eating a healthier diet with less salt, exercising regularly and taking medication can help lower blood pressure.

Abstinence from sex has obvious health benefits which span from non-infection from sexually related illnesses in particular STD and HIV which are very prevalent in South Africa. The country is leading in HIV infections in the world (Jamieson,2020). Other benefits of course including preventions of unplanned pregnancies in particularly among teenagers. South Africa has very high numbers of HIV infections in females in the ages of 15-24. (Stat SA:2017). The prevention of HIV

infections increases the life expectancy rate of the country as South Africa has lost million to AIDS. Between 1997 and 2010 it estimated that about 2.8 million South Africans lost their lives to AIDS (Bradshaw, 2016). South Africa has a high prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse which far wide implications and these range from social impacts such as a crime, violence and even loss of life. Health implications are far less talked about though, alcohol affects cognitive faculties. People who are drunk have a very low chance of being able to make good health decisions, couple that with a country with so many diseases including HIV/Aids and you have a higher risk of new infections. Cigarettes are known to be a direct cause of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases. Abstaining from smoking cigarettes reduces the chances of one suffering from such diseases.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

Shembe or the Shembe church is an organization that is over 100 years old. However, sourcing out reliable and accurate information on the organization proved difficult especially because this was a desktop study. The findings however suggest that Shembe intended his followers to be independent and self-reliant, eliminating his people's reliance on the colonial state (Heuser, 2008). Shembe's teachings extend to every aspect of a person's life from their relationship with nature, their relationship with the fellow man and their spiritual relations. The approach to wellbeing is one that requires a holistic approach that cannot be over reliant on one and the overreliance on medicine can end up hurting one's health instead of improving it. Isiah Shembe understood this and although he discouraged use of medicine ahead of choosing a healthy lifestyle, he did leave provisions for his people to perhaps create their own medical infrastructure. The approach seems similar to a black organization that intended to exist independently of the state with its own systems of rule even in economic and health infrastructure. However, some of those teachings have not been kept however they are still there and are not lost. The next Chapter concludes.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study is titled: More Than a Church: Health Benefits of Devotion to Shembe Teachings and Lifestyle in the case Shembe Congregation. This title is what has guided the inquisition within the research and thus the aim of the study is to essentially find a link between the way of life within the Shembe community and whether or not it has or at least could have any significant influence the health of an individual and community at large. Isiah Shembe emphasizes Mosaic Laws as the cornerstone of his teachings (Shembe,1945). Mosaic Laws refers the laws found in the first five books in the bible (Sprinkle,2006). This chapter offers a broad discussion of the findings of the data collected and offers a qualitative analysis of the data. The data collected in the research shall be put under scrutiny and reported on with certain conclusions being reached using the information made available by the research. The critique shall focus on three main facets of the Shembe Church namely:

- Spiritual Healing
- Recreational Activities
- The Diet of The Church

The three above mentioned facets are what might be the corner stone of the Shembe community's way of life and therefore they have taken center stage in this chapter of the research.

### **5.2 A Discussion of Shembe**

#### **5.2.1 Spiritual Healing**

Any belief system that makes pronouncements about universal truths must be subjected to vigorous criticisms and interrogation. It is thus necessary for the purposes of this research that Shembe is subjected to such scrutiny. While Shembe does discourage the use of medicine, it is not only the lifestyle that he suggests as an alternative. There is a great reliance on spiritual healing and prayer. To bring this to the level that rivals medicine is difficult because the weight of evidence is much

higher than that of spiritual healing. The idea that religious leaders or people who act within that realm draw ability from a sacrosanct, all knowing, loving & powerful deity requires unmeasurable piety from the congregation (Burgess,2009). There have been many cases of people falling, out of respect, pretending to be healed when prayed for out of respect for the leader because there are certain stigmas if you do not fall such as you're possessed by a strong demon (Wariboko, 2014). Figure 5 below shows Inkosi Isiah Shembe Praying for Congregants as part of healing.



Figure 5: Inkosi Isiah Shembe Praying for Congregants

Those who are deemed to possess "seeing" powers (A.K.A Psychic ability) have been known to be masters of Barnum statements (Forer Effect) (Vohs, 2007). The main reason why people can say that about such medicine is because modern medicine has allowed scientific testing to be part and parcel of the process developing the culture of transparency and accountability in their profession. The general position is that of humility and understanding of human error. It is one that says we do the best we can with human limitation & error.

This is not the position for spiritual/religious leaders. They claim supernatural ability and when such expectation backfires, they resort to the confines of rational "reasonable person" doctrine

which merely refers to the ordinary man's reasoning ability and drops the standards of evidence to subjective personal experiences, not the supernatural ability which they sometimes claim (Nourse, 2008). This is an act one might want to describe as the shifting of goalposts which falls short of scientific truth. To begin with, they do not even fit within the "expert" doctrine which can be simply described as someone who has special knowledge, skill and training which deems it appropriate for them to be called experts in that subject matter (Coffey, 2004). Psychic abilities however fall short of this standard as there seems to be no real accountability, transparency or even procedure at times in the way they work.

In the late 1800s, in England, they had "medicines" known as Placebos...they were usually given to terminally ill patients, it made them feel better, temporarily, but they were said to be stopped because they were unethical (Goetz, 2002). They were known to not having healing agents within them, but it was rather the expectation of healing that made the patient feel better, for a short while. This is mentioned to demonstrate the long journey which modern medicine has had to travel. It is difficult for one to confidently claim this for spiritual healing as it has not been subjected to vigorous and transparent testing (Magner, 2017). It is the collective evidentiary weight of modern medicine that sustains their profession and not the idea that one has to first have to believe, operate beyond reason & skepticism, before spiritual prowess is demonstrated (Burkhardt, 1989). Such is the epitome of indoctrination.

### **5.2.2 Umgidi**

Umgidi is a dance and with this dance, every part of your body is engaged. You move your arms, head, legs, sing all at once and this forms as an intense form. Dancing engages and combines the benefits of aerobics and therefore the health benefits should not be understated. However, this alone cannot replace regular medical attention and modern medicine that is meant to aid the body. However, the main critique would be that for Umgidi to really have a lasting impact on one's physical health would require great consistency and AmaNazaretha generally only have their large gatherings only three times in a year (January, May and July). This is most certainly beneficial; however, it is possible that its benefits are exaggerated. This is a common feature amongst religious people. The hyper critique of this lies in that if it is to be concluded that Shembe is correct. The lifestyle he puts forward could potentially replace modern medicine in its entirety, in the sense that

healthy living and a responsible way of life is meant to prevent illnesses entirely. It is not to say it is impossible, just that it seems very difficult. The Figure below is an illustration Umgidi at Ekuphakameni during the annual July festival.



Figure 6: Inkosi V.V “Incoyincoyi” Shembe dancing with congregants Ekuphakameni (Shembe Media, 2019)

### 5.2.3 Shembe’s Diet

Isiah Shembe places great emphasis on Mosaic Laws and thus there are certain foods that AmaNazaretha are not permitted to eat like pork for instances. Shembe goes on to further add other foods to the list like salt, cooking oil and chicken. With that said, aside from the few things which are prohibited, Shembe provides no comprehensive diet, at least there is none that is codified. As a researcher one is left with having to dig deep and find out what the diet might have been had Shembe provided one. The implications are that Shembe wanted to steer his followers towards a Nguni lifestyle and perhaps that is the most noticeable things about the Shembe congregation as exemplified by their Zulu base from where most come from. However, it is a problem to just say that one should look to Nguni traditions for the diet as even there, it is open to interpretation as alcohol for instance is not prohibited amongst Nguni’s, some in fact make traditional beer part and parcel of Nguni lifestyle which is not something Shembe encourages. A lot of what is today considered Nguni actually has its origins from colonial constructs. For instance, the 11 lobola cows are understood to be tradition however their origins can be traced back to Theophilus Shepstone or

Somtseu (Brookes, 1924). Shembe undeniably did a lot however when it comes to the diet aspect. He left a lot to his congregants to interpret for themselves from his teachings and this leaves room for subjectivity and very little uniformity. What is clear however is that Shembe heavily believed in organic food. In contemporary South Africa it would be difficult for the ordinary Shembe congregant to adhere to such a diet as most are rural residents and form part of the broader black South African community that is impoverished. Organic foods that are healthy with no genetic modification are expensive and generally out of reach for the poor. This however cannot be a fault of Shembe.

Shembe's teachings have unquestionable social and health benefits, one needs to merely look towards the order and discipline found within the Shembe congregation. For instance, it is difficult to find fault in the non-alcoholic nature of the Shembe congregation as alcohol is always found at the centre of most social problems within the black community. Major social issues like gender-based violence or domestic violence usually have alcohol as one of the causal factors. Most reported cases of violent crimes in South Africa occur between Friday and Sunday, a period in which the South African population usually tends to go on a drinking frenzy. Thus, there is a very clear benefit in reducing alcohol consumption within communities. However, when it comes to the loftier assertions Shembe makes or maybe his disciples at least, there is definitely a great responsibility for Shembe congregants to conduct more academic research to prove the hypothesis which says Shembe's lifestyle teachings, if followed can be a viable alternative to modern medicine and develop it to scholarly level. In some of the assertions made and the evidence provided there is clear evidence of bias. Oral evidence from congregants is not always the most reliable as they have an emotional attachment to their leaders and are likely to have confirmation bias when presenting evidence. In order to elevate their beliefs and leaders to superhuman status, some testimonies are narrated in a very sensational way that sometimes bends the truth.

The assertions about the Shembe lifestyle are capable of being able to replace medicine entirety is one such example. It is a claim that is difficult to prove conclusively as there is no real clear lifestyle pronouncements that addresses the issues of diet. Perhaps what can be said is that the teachings of Shembe could work collaboratively with modern medicine to improve general

health of communities. This can be said because the health benefits of the lifestyle Shembe teaches can be found in the sense that they may not necessarily treat ailments however they can help in the prevention of many diseases and it is always better to prevent disease.

#### **5.4 Modern Limitations to Practicing Shembe's Teachings**

One of many questions one could ask about Shembe's teachings is how well they might have stood the test of time. Inkosi Isiah Shembe died on 02 May 1935 KwaMbonambi North of Richards Bay in one of his villages he named Mkhayideni. 87 years have passed since Isiah Shembe took his last breath and in the same period, South Africa has gone through tremendous metamorphosis. Indeed, along with the country, the Shembe church itself has gone through changes, changes that would probably make it difficult for the prophet to recognize it as his own. After the passing of Isiah Shembe's successor J.G Shembe, the turmoil that ensued afterwards changed the trajectory of the church and probably one of the most powerful independently black institutions became a shadow of what its founder envisaged. The Nazareth Baptist Church today has been split more than 4 times and although they are a large in numbers, their numbers do little to advance Isiah Shembe's vision as they are unable to work together.

##### **5.4.1 Divisions of Shembe People**

Shembe's vision of AmaNazaretha being a people who self-determine is a possibility, however it would require unity amongst all factions to come together for the common goals which they share. The estimated 3 million strong religion is a potential powerhouse but after more than 40 years of court battles of succession, hopes of unity are slim to none. Shembe's teachings of avoiding hospitals entirely is assumed to have been because he had a vision for AmaNazaretha to have their own hospitals with doctors that they could trust. However, this has not come to fruition and therefore it is difficult for AmaNazaretha to avoid hospitals where they are treated by people who are not AmaNazaretha. No matter how healthy a lifestyle you lead it is nearly impossible to live in South Africa and avoid hospitals all your life. This is one of Shembe's teachings that AmaNazaretha are unable to keep as it simply is not possible in the modern world.

### **5.4.2 Modern Day Mass Media Influences**

Shembe's teachings of abstinence for young girls and boys would be very effective if the Shembe community was a little more organized. However, because this is not the case, they do not exist in a vacuum, AmaNazaretha and their children are subject to influences and pressures of the modern world. Their children go to school for 6 hours 5 days a week, being influenced and taught by people who have never heard of Shembe in some cases and preaching a totally different message and influence. The exposure to explicit sexual content on social media and television at a very young age goes against anything Shembe might have wanted for his people as the behavior it encourages goes against what Shembe envisioned as the best way to live if you are interested in building a well-functioning society. The only time AmaNazaretha have time to be taught about Shembe's teachings is mostly during the sabbath and so it is difficult for them to not be overwhelmed by other influences (Collins et al, 2017).

### **5.4.3 Modern Day Dating Culture**

This will also tie into the virtues of the sacred practices of Shembe marriages. While dating is prohibited in the church, Shembe children grow up in blended communities whereby their peers are dating and engaging in sexual intercourse and more it is unlikely that they are not influenced at all by this. There is further influence not just in the community but also in television content and even on social media, the culture of dating is the norm (Stoicescu, 2019). The prospect of marrying someone you have not engaged with even in conversation prior to marrying them seems an absurd idea however it is one which has been being practiced for over a century in the Shembe community. The conservative Shembe belief system is difficult to implement in the modern day because there are so many other competing ideologies and the Shembe community barely has any control of the type of education their children consume once they are outside the vicinity of a Shembe temple. Thus, another sacred Shembe practice coming under threat because the Shembe community is fragmented and scattered across the country.

#### **5.4.4 Poverty in the Shembe Community**

The Shembe community does not exist in a vacuum, they are a part of a much larger predominantly black community. Almost half (49%) of the South African population lives below the upper bound poverty line (Jain, 2020). The type of diet Shembe encourages is one which requires or encourages his people to have is one which is expensive to maintain and AmaNazaretha are generally dominated by rural Zulu and while they are large in numbers, many of them, like majority of black South Africans are poor and cannot afford proper diets. Their collective potential is immense even economically however as long as they remain fragmented, they will be unable to harness this to alleviate themselves from poverty.

#### **5.5 Recommendations**

The Shembe community although fragmented and divided is a very large one, it is estimated to be 3 million strong. The collective force of 3 million people working towards the same goal would be overwhelming if it could be harnessed. Isiah Shembe gave AmaNazaretha the correct blueprint for uplifting a community and it is that blueprint that AmaNazaretha should turn to. Shembe encouraged collective ownership of land, shops and farms. Isiah and J.G Shembe built schools and settlements owned by the community of AmaNazaretha with the leader of the church acting merely as a custodian to these communal assets. According to John Dube, Isiah Shembe left over 40 properties under the custodianship of J.G Shembe as the titular head of the church. J.G Shembe used these to give AmaNazaretha land to build their homes, schools and somewhat improve the quality of life for AmaNazaretha.

The modern world, while it offers a lot of challenges for the Shembe community, in the midst of those challenges it also offers a lot of opportunity. The strength of numbers and being able to be organized for a common goal is the strength of the Shembe community. Even if they have differences however, they still have shared common goals. There are many religious communities that do not entirely agree on everything however still find ways to collaborate and agree on certain goals that will be beneficial to the whole community despite differences. The establishment of businesses that cater specifically to Shembe people is something that ought to be pursued in the same mold of the Muslim community and their Halaal restaurants for instance.

The Shembe community should be very capable of mobilizing their collective power to build their own educational and financial institutions and others that will cater to the needs of AmaNazaretha and move them closer towards the vision Isiah Shembe had for AmaNazaretha which is a community that is self-sustaining with its own value system education, health and economic infrastructure with the state only providing a supporting role. They do not even need to unite entirely, even in their divisions, each faction still holds a significantly considerable support in numbers, and this can enable each faction to collectively work towards creating their own institutions to serve the collective goals of the Shembe community and alleviate poverty. The bottom line is that Shembe's vision was a collective and holistic one for AmaNazaretha and it can never be fully realized as long as they are still laborer for other people and the only way, they can fully become AmaNazaretha as Isiah Shembe envisaged, they need to unite. As Isiah Shembe writes and says "wonke AmaNazaretha makabe munye njengebumba likasimende" meaning let all AmamNazaretha unite and let their unity be as strong as cement (Shembe, 1940). Ultimately, for AmaNazaretha to uplift themselves, they need to go back to the teachings of the founder and use them to uplift themselves.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The spiritual healing in the Shembe church is not something that can be totally dismissed as the oral evidence collected by various scholars cannot be totally dismissed however, if the intention is to elevate to scientific or academic levels where it is put through vigorous empirical testing, one cannot help but feel that it may just fall short of that particular standard. The medical field remains streaks ahead in this situation. There is definitely good health and general social benefits to the lifestyle encouraged by Shembe, that cannot be denied however it should be looked at something to compliment modern medicine not necessarily rival or replace, these two disciplines can easily coexist and collaborate. Where Shembe's teachings are most successful are in the social aspect. Discouraging alcohol use, premarital sex amongst other teachings helps humans lead a good lifestyle that is safer from disease and crime. However, what is clear is that for these teachings to begin to truly serve the Shembe community, the Shembe community needs to unite and harness their collective strength of numbers. This will help them in alleviating poverty within the community, granting them independence to pursue their goals of educational economical and

health wellness, and perhaps truly realizing Isiah Shembe's vision of building more than just a church.

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## APPENDICES

FIGURE 1:



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FIGURE 2:

Shembe Maidens in their Umgidi attire on Nhlankakazi Mountain, January 2019

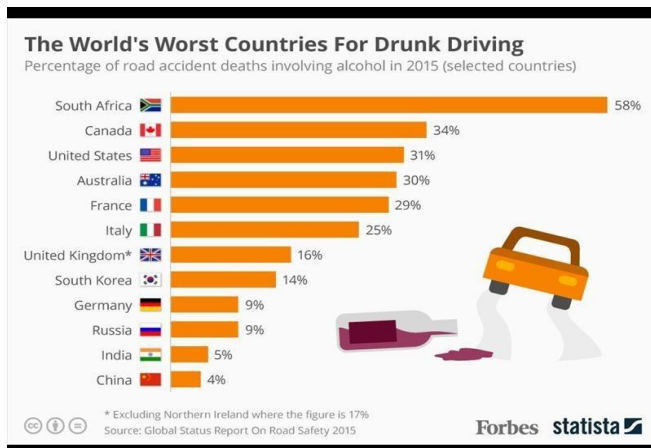


FIGURE 3:



Unmarried Young Shembe Men in their Umgidi attire at Ekuphakameni, July 2020

FIGURE 4:



Rekord East. (2016). High drunk driving statistics for SA. [online] Available at: <https://rekord.co.za/104540/high-drunk-driving-statistics-for-sa> [Accessed 12 Jan. 2022].

FIGURE 5:

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FIGURE 6:



Awukho Umuzi Ongawakhelwa Inyanga - Inkosi Incoyincoyi 24/10/2020 Part-3 - Youtube

